

PEREK SHIRA

THE SONG OF EXISTENCE

*The Symphony Orchestra
of Creation*



Shmuel B. Kraines

עזרי מעם ה' עושה שמים וארץ

PEREK SHIRA

*with an inspirational commentary,
entitled:*

The Song of Existence

SECOND EDITION

By Shmuel Ben-Tzion Kraines
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*Dedicated in loving, eternal memory of
my father, my teacher, and my mentor,
Rabbi Ze'ev Shlomo Kraines, of blessed memory.*



*And in honor of
my mother, my teacher, and my mentor.*

נר מצוה ותורה אור

לעילוי נשמת:

חווה לאה בת יוסף ליב



יוסף חיים אלתר בן ניסל מאיר



פרידה בת ישעיה



זכריה ליב בן יצחק טוביה



ראשה בת זאב



אברהם דוד בן מאיר



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חיים הערשל בן וולוועל



תבלח"ט, לזכות ציבה בת פולי
לנחת ושמחה מכל משפחתה

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OHR SOMAYACH SANDTON



1 Shingwetzi Rd, Cnr. Mooiriver, Gallo Manor, Sandton.
P.O.Box 1433, Gallo Manor 2052, Tel: +27 11 804-3425
Home +2711 804-5563, Email: office@ohrsandton.com
Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines

בס"ד
טז שבט תשע"ח

My dear son R' Shmuel Ben-tzion נ"י has worked with great devotion to produce this magnificent commentary on *Perek Shira* in memory of his grandparents and the grandparents of his wife Rivka תח. It is being published to mark the first *yahrtzeit* of my father-in-law, Mr. Julius Chapman זצ"ל יוסף חיים אלתר בן ניסל מאיר זצ"ל

One can see the great effort that has gone into the clarification of every nuance of metaphor and allusion, as well as the perceptive guidance in how to “live the song” in our daily lives.

These insights have been carefully and faithfully sourced from classic and contemporary commentaries on the work and have been interpreted with precision and creativity. The song of Creation rises from its pages, inspiring all who will take its messages to heart.

May the publication of this *sefer* be a source of *zechus* for the *neshamos* of all of your grandparents and also bring *berachah* to you and Rivkah as you raise your precious children in the *derech HaTorah*.

With Love and Pride,

Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines
Ohr Somayach Sandton

Rabbi Chaim Walkin
7 Kassuto st.
Jerusalem

הרב חיים וואלקין
רחוב קאסוטו 7
ירושלים

[illegible]

With love,
Chaim Walkin

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Every human heart naturally appreciates the beauty of the world. Unravelling the meaning of its songs, as they are expressed in *Perek Shira*, effectively translates that earthly appreciation into holy words of divine praise. Moreover, the study of *Perek Shira* trains the soul's ear to hear the world's music on its own accord, perceiving even songs not mentioned in *Perek Shira*. Ultimately, through the Creation, one comes to better know the Creator.

Knowledge and praise of Hashem are amongst the primary reasons for the universe's creation. As the Midrash records, "Hashem fashioned man with a mouth, saying, 'If not for the praises and songs that the Jewish nation say before Me every day, I would not have created the heavens and the earth.'"¹

Therefore, it has been an undeserved privilege to analyze and explain *Perek Shira*. I approached the task with the reverence of a sacred responsibility, carefully contemplating the essence of each being and pondering how it is expressed through its ascribed song. In a labor of love, I studied all the commentaries I could find, considered all possibilities, and researched all doubts, before finally deciphering each being's song to the best of my ability.² I am indebted to R' Eliezer Korman, who authored *Perek Shira Hashalem*, a meticulously edited collection of numerous commentaries on *Perek Shira*. I am also grateful to R' Amitai Ben-David, author of *Sichas Chulin*, who kindly gave me of his time and expert knowledge to identify many of the animals. I owe particular thanks to Mrs. Liora Silver for sparking this revised edition, advising, and publishing it in Spanish for the occasion of the Bas-Mitzvah of her daughter, Atara Sara. May it be a merit for the whole esteemed family. I thank Mrs. Tova Younger for assisting in the editorial process. I owe an unreturnable debt of gratitude to my parents, my teachers, my parents-in-law, and my wife. Finally, I am filled with gratitude to the Creator, to Whom I shall sing as long as I live.

* * *

It is striking that the universe's praise, expressed through the 84 songs of *Perek Shira*, does not seem to include the lead soloist: man.

This can be understood as follows. Man is the king of the world, second in command only to Hashem, and he incorporates all the songs of *Perek Shira* within him, plus much more. The verses of *Perek Shira* are only a minute fraction of the 24 books of Tanach written about man and his world. The

¹ אותיות דרבי עקיבא, אות אל"ף.

² Nonetheless, I warmly welcome critiques and improvements.

universe was created principally for man, who has the intelligence and free choice to relate meaningfully with the Creator. It is only when he chooses to sing and to emulate the world's songs of praise that they are fully expressed and are appreciated by Hashem. In this sense, man is the conductor of the symphony orchestra of all of the myriad elements of the universe.¹

Moreover, each Jew's life, with all of its ups and downs, forms its own unique composition. Even more profoundly, the Sages teach that even one Jew is enough of a reason for the whole world's creation. This means that each Jew's life, his family, his influence, and his personal comprehension of the world – all combine to form his own world-song to the Creator.

Understand this, fellow Jew. It is up to you to reveal the beauty of every aspect of your life, and lead your world to sing to the Creator. You, the conductor, stand before a titanic, attentive orchestra. The effects of your every action, word, and thought reverberates through the worlds and expresses song through them. Even the innumerable angelic legions resound mightily through endless space with a thundering chorus of harmony to your song. The song is divine; the music fills the heavens and the earth. The melody lasts eternally, beautiful beyond the comprehension of its singers, fully appreciated only by its sole audience: Hashem Himself. The world waits for your every signal. What will you sing to the Living God?

Realize that you and your deeds have great significance. More importantly, realize the song of beauty that emerges from you and your world, no matter what your current situation, and even when you are not trying your utmost to do so. The song of your very existence is constant and its beauty is flawless. Your entire life is a song to the Creator. He is listening even now.

Shmuel Kraines

¹ Another reason man is not included in *Perek Shira* is that animals and inanimate beings sing their parts unchangingly, whereas every person sings variably according to his life setting, self-design, and free choice. Nevertheless, some contend that man's song is: "שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד" (מספרים). "שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד" (תהילות ה', ע"י תלמיד הרמ"ע מפאנו. ע"ע שפתי רננות. When we use ourselves and the world around us to declare Hashem's kingship and reveal His all-encompassing praise, we are singing that He is one and only. Our role as singers of Hashem's praise is inescapable. Even failure to perform Hashem's brings about His praise to some extent by that which He treats each person justly, for the good or for the bad. However, the most desirable song is undoubtedly that of pure goodness.

PREFACE

Who wrote Perek Shira?

Since the beginning of history, our ancestors noticed how the world “sings” to its creator. This concept is mentioned in the Gemara in various places. However, the first record of a collection of these songs was that of King David. Thereafter, King Shlomo, in his even greater wisdom, added on to those songs.¹ It is not clear if their compilation is the same version we have today, especially since a quarter of Perek Shira is comprised of verses written long after their times. However, it could be that Kings David and Shlomo knew the verses prophetically already then.² Many indeed opine that our version Perek Shira was written by King David³, King Shlomo⁴, or both⁵, but the matter remains unproven. Still others submit that it was compiled by R’ Eliezer⁶ or another Tana.⁷ It is certainly an ancient compilation, classified as a Baraisa, and dating not before King David, and not after the Mishna.⁸

When should Perek Shira be recited?

R’ Moshe Mitrani, a great Rishon, writes that it should be recited every morning when the experience of the world is most felt, and this is also the time that the beings

¹ Zohar, שמות דף יח ב, quoted by R’ Mordechai Gross.

² Yashir Moshe, quoting Tosafos [לע"ד יש לחלק קצת]. He is unsure if King David foretold the actual verses of the later prophets, or if he only spoke the concept of each song, and these will later be crystalized with verses. Alternatively, it could be that some verses were forgotten and others were added.

³ The great Rishon, R’ Moshe Mitrani. He suggests that King David wrote Perek Shira after he completed Tehillim and was encountered by a frog, as recorded in the introduction to Perek Shira.

⁴ Mesaprim Tehillos Hashem and Yaavetz. It is written about King Shlomo – and quoted in the introduction to Perek Shira – that he had 1005 songs.

⁵ R’ Mordechai Gross. It is certainly true that most of *Perek Shira*’s verses are excerpts of the writings of Kings David and Shlomo.

⁶ באר מים חיים בראשית ו. ואברהם זקן פ"א, ח.

⁷ Many write that it was R’ Chanina Ben Dosa. "רבי" Pi Eliyahu suggests that Rabbi was the final compiler.

⁸ Many variant versions of Perek Shira were published over the past few hundred years. In the Shlah’s Siddur, he certifies a different version to be the authentic one used by the Rishonim. [It is available, with commentary, by email request.] Nevertheless, we have used the Yaavetz’s edition for this publication, since it is of no less credence and was upheld by many commentaries since its publication. Moreover, seeing as it is the standard version available today, it would seem that the Heavens have placed their stamp on it.

say their Shira.¹ That is the time when the sun and moon switch prominence, animals look for food, birds sing, and the Jewish nation rises to pray. The *Knaf Renanim* writes that the Acharonim included it in the Siddur to be recited daily. The *Eliyahu Raba* reported that the custom was to divide its recital throughout the week, whereas the *Peh Dovid*² contends that it should ideally be recited in its entirety daily, and especially on Shabbos. The *Mesaprim Tehilos Hashem* opines that there is no set time when one has to say it, seeing as the wheat only sings at the beginning of Nisan.³ The *Shulchan Hatahor*⁴ records that it is a great *tikun* (rectification) to say it at an *Es Ratzon* (time of favor). R' Chaim Palaji⁵ considers *Tehilim* 148, the third of the five “Halelukahs” which are recited every morning in *Pesukei Dzimra*, to be a “source and open root” for Perek Shira. It follows that its recital is like a partial recital of Perek Shira. Others note that even by living according to the teachings of Perek Shira, one has “involved” himself with Perek Shira. In conclusion, seeing as it is not coded in the *Mishna Berura*, its recital remains a matter of custom and personal consideration.

How do the beings sing, and why should we recite their songs?

All physical beings have angelic counterparts in heaven who literally sing their songs, and the physical beings express their songs with their own voices or movements,⁶ as well as with their unique natural appearances and functions.⁷ Each song also carries a moral lesson which is an emulation of the goodness of its Creator. Therefore, by people acting according to that lesson, they are expressing the song further.⁸ The fullest expression of the beings' songs is when the chosen nation sings them by reciting Perek Shira with understanding. When we sing Perek Shira, we empower the angels to sing their respective songs, and we bring down life, sustenance, and blessing to the world.⁹

¹ כתבי האריז"ל. The most opportune time to praise Hashem is just before daybreak.

² פתיחה.

³ Refer to the appendix regarding how and when the beings say Shira.

⁴ א, ח.

⁵ ימצא חיים ס"ד.

⁶ זוהר חיי שרה קכג. ע"פ רח"ו, מובא באור החמה, וע"ע שם ע"פ ר"א גלאמטי. Even in the seemingly lifeless desert, winds sometimes play music by blowing over sand-dunes, as was famously noted by Marco Polo.

⁷ Maharal.

⁸ *Mabit*. Also *Sefer Ha'ikarim* of R' Yoself Albo, who explains that the phrase "...אומר" means that it implies the moral lesson or wisdom of that Posuk, and "כל האומר פרק שירה" means to think, as in "אמרתי אני בלבי". We have combined together differing opinions, an approach based on *Shaar Shimon* in אלים שבשרצים.

⁹ *Nefesh Hachaim* (א, יא), Yaavetz, and שער מאמרי רשב"י. Furthermore, according to the Kabbalah, each being is rooted within man (מרכבה רבה דפדע"א ה' ע"ב ע"פ תורת העולה ח"ב ה"ג, הובא בשירת יצחק).

INTRODUCTION OF PEREK SHIRA

אמר רבי: כל העוסק בפרק שירה בעולם הזה זוכה ללמוד וללמד, לשמור ולעשות ולקיים, ותלמודו מתקיים בידו, וניצול מיצר הרע ומפגע רע ומחיבוט הקבר ומדינה של גהינום ומחבלי של משיח, ומאריך ימים, וזוכה לימות המשיח ולחיי העולם הבא.

תניא אמר רבי אליעזר כל האומר שירה זו בעולם הזה זוכה ואומר לעולם הבא שנאמר אז ישיר משה שר לא נאמר אלא ישיר אותו לעתיד לבא.

תניא רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר כל העוסק בפרק שירה זה בכל יום מעיד אני עליו שהוא בן עולם הבא וניצול מפגע רע ומיצר הרע ומדין קשה ומשטן ומכל מיני משחית ומזיקין.

גמור בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך לדעת דרכי ולשמור דלתות היכלי ותורתי ולשמור מצוותי וחוקי. נצור תורתי בלבבך ונגד עיניך תהיה יראתי. שמור פיך ולשונך מכל חטא ואשמה ואני אהיה עמך בכל מקום שתלך ואלמדך שכל ובינה מכל דבר. והוי יודע שכל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא לא בראו אלא לכבודו. שנאמר "כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו יצרתיו אף עשיתיו."¹

אמרו חז"ל על דויד מלך ישראל בשעה שסיים ספר תהילים זחה דעתו עליו ואמר לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, "יש בריה שבראת בעולמך שאומרת שירות ותשבחות יותר ממני?" באותה שעה נזדמן לו צפרדע אחת ואמרה לו, "דויד, אל תזוח דעתך עליך שאני אומרת שירות ותשבחות יותר ממך. ולא עוד אלא כל שירה שאני אומרת ממשלת עליה שלושת אלפים משלים. שנאמר "וידבר שלושת אלפים משל ויהי שירו חמישה ואלף"². ולא עוד אלא שאני עוסקת במצוה גדולה. וזו היא מצוה גדולה שאני עוסקת בה. יש בשפת הים מין אחד שאין פרנסתו כי אם מן המים, ובשעה שהוא רעב נוטלני ואוכלני. זו היא המצוה. לקיים מה שנאמר: "אם רעב שונאך האכילהו לחם, ואם צמא השקהו מים, כי גחלים אתה חותה על ראשו, וה' ישלם לך"³. אל תקרי "ישלם" לך אלא "ישלמנו" לך.

רבי: Said Rabbi: Anyone who involves himself in [the study of] Perek Shira in this world merits to learn and to teach, to safeguard, to do, and to fulfill; his learning is retained in his hand; he is saved from the Yetzer Hara, bad

¹ ישעיה מג, ז.

² מלכים-א, ה, יב.

³ משלי כה, כא.

incidents, blows of the grave¹, the judgment of Gehinnom and the birth-pangs of Mashiach; he merits long life, and merits to the days of Mashiach and the life of the World to Come.²

תניא אמר רבי אליעזר: A *Baraisa* teaching: Said R' Eliezer: whoever says this song in this world merits to say it in the World to Come, as it is written, "Then Moshe will sing". It does not say "sang", but rather "will sing", implying that he will sing it in the future.³

תניא רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר: A *Baraisa* teaching: R' Eliezer the Great said: Whoever is involved in [the study of] this Perek Shira every day, I testify about him that he is a member of the World to Come and will be saved from any bad incident, the Yetzer Hara, harsh judgment, the Satan, and all kinds of destruction and spiritual damagers.

גמור בכל לבבך: Learn with all of your heart and soul to know My ways and to be diligent at the doors of My sanctuary and My Torah, and to keep my Mitzvos and statutes. Protect the Torah in your heart and let My awe be in front of your eyes. Protect your mouth from any sin and guilt, and I will be with you every place you go, and I will teach you insight and understanding from every matter. And you should know that all that Hashem created, He did not create it except for His honor, as it is written, "All that is called in My name and that for My glory I created, I fashioned it, and also made it".⁴

אמרו חז"ל: The Sages of blessed memory said of David, king of Yisrael, that at the time he completed the book of *Tehillim* he felt prideful⁵ and he said before

¹ Sins create destructive forces which beat the perpetrator's *nefesh*-soul in the grave to cleanse it and achieve atonement.

² One who praises Hashem, a principle purpose of Creation, merits to reveal Hashem's praise to the world through the Torah and its fulfillment. He is also unhindered, as stated in the next paragraph. ע"ע מרכבת שלמה ל"ח ע"ב ורזיאל המלאך דף לה ע"א, הובאו בשירת יצחק.

³ In its simple sense, "אז ישיר" clearly refers to the Song of the Sea, and not to other songs. It is brought in reference of Perek Shira, too, since the Zohar (בשלה נד: ע"ש) derives from the extra word "את" an inclusion of all songs emitted by both divine and earthly beings. This implies that the Song of the Sea is the root and essence of all songs, and therefore all songs share its merit. (*Shiras Yitzchak*) One who sings to Hashem even while He is hidden and the time is imperfect for song, will merit to rebirth in the true time of song, when all is clear and he can sing that very song in its full sense.

⁴ The entire universe was created to reveal Hashem's glory. Therefore, when coupled with the diligent study of the Torah, it is possible to perceive Hashem through the natural world.

⁵ Lit. his mind became aloof.

Hashem, “Is there a creature that you created in Your world that says songs and praises more than me?” At that time a frog happened before him and said to him, “David, do not feel prideful, for I say more songs and praises than you. Not only that, but I analogize every song which I sing with 3000 parables, as it is written: “He spoke three thousand parables and his song was 1005”. Not only that, but I am involved in a great Mitzva. This is the Mitzva which I am involved in: On the seashore there is a species whose sustenance is only from the water and, when it is hungry, it takes me and eats me. This is the Mitzva. Thereby I fulfill that which it is written “If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for coals you are pouring on his head, and Hashem will compensate you.” Do not read the words “ישלם לך” [“I will compensate you”, literally] but rather “ישלמנו לך” [“I will make him at peace with you”].¹

¹ The *Yaavetz* explains this cryptic introduction to Perek Shira to mean that King David was told not to be prideful about his completion of *Tehillim*, since his son Shlomo would yet comprehend the songs of the entire universe with his wisdom and compile Perek Shira. [צפרדע means “gatherer of wisdom” (תד"א רבה פ"ז)]. See preface regarding the disputed authorship of Perek Shira. Another possible interpretation, supported by a parallel passage in the Zohar (פנחס רלב), is that the being to which the frog sacrifices itself is the crocodile, the symbol of Egypt. It refers to the frog's jumping into the furnaces of Egypt to neutralize the Egyptians.

PEREK SHIRA

פרק א

שָׁמַיִם אוֹמְרִים: הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מֵגִיד הַרְקִיעַ.
אֶרֶץ אוֹמֶרֶת: לֵה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ תִּבְלֵ וַיֵּשְׁבִי בָּהּ. וְאוֹמֵר: מִכֶּנֶף
הָאָרֶץ זְמַרְתָּ שְׁמַעְנוּ צְבִי לְצַדִּיק.
גֵּן עֵדֶן אוֹמֵר: עוֹרֵי צָפוֹן וּבֹאֵי תִימָן הִפִּיחִי גִנִּי יִזְלוּ בְּשִׁמּוֹ יָבֵא דוֹדִי
לִגְנוֹ וַיֹּאכֵל פְּרִי מִגְדִּיו.
גִּיהֶנֶם אוֹמֵר: כִּי הִשְׁבִּיעַ נֶפֶשׁ שְׁקָקָה וְנֶפֶשׁ רָעָבָה מְלֵא טוֹב.
מִדְּבַר אוֹמֵר: יִשְׁשׁוּם מִדְּבַר וְצִיָּה וְתִגְלַע עֲרֶבָה וְתִפְרַח כְּחִבְצֵלֶת.
שָׁדוֹת אוֹמְרִים: ה' בְּחֻקָּהּ יָסַד אֶרֶץ כּוֹנֵן שָׁמַיִם בְּתַבּוּנָה.
מַיִם אוֹמְרִים: לִקּוֹל תִּתּוֹ הַמּוֹן מַיִם בַּשָּׁמַיִם וַיַּעַל נִשְׁאִים מִקְצֵה אֶרֶץ.
יַמִּים אוֹמְרִים: מִקְלוֹת מַיִם רַבִּים אֲדִירִים מִשְׁפְּרִי יָם אֲדִיר בְּמָרוֹם
ה'.

נְהָרוֹת אוֹמְרִים: נְהָרוֹת יִמְחָאוּ כֹף יָחַד הָרִים יִרְגְּנוּ.
מַעֲיָנוֹת אוֹמְרִים: וְשָׁרִים כְּחִלְלִים כָּל מַעֲיָנִי בָּךְ.

פרק ב

יוֹם אוֹמֵר: יוֹם לַיּוֹם יִבִּיעַ אֶמֶר וְלַיְלָה לַלַּיְלָה יִסְוֶה דָּעַת.
לַיְלָה אוֹמֵר: לִהְגִּיד בַּבֶּקֶר חֲסִדָּךְ וְאַמוּנָתְךָ בְּלִילוֹת.
שֶׁמֶשׁ אוֹמֵר: שֶׁמֶשׁ יָרַח עָמַד זָבֵלָה לְאוֹר חֲצִיךָ יִהְלְכוּ לְנִגְהָ בְּרַק
חֲנִיתְךָ.
יָרֵחַ אוֹמֶרֶת: עָשָׂה יָרַח לְמוֹעֲדִים שֶׁמֶשׁ יָדַע מְבוֹאוֹ.
כּוֹכָבִים אוֹמְרִים: אַתָּה הוּא ה' לְבִדְךָ אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמִי
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל צָבָאָם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הַיָּמִים וְכָל אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וְאַתָּה
מַחֲיָה אֶת כָּלָם וּצָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם לְךָ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים.

עבים אומרים: יֵשֶׁת חֲשֹׁךְ סָתְרוּ סְבִיבוֹתָיו סָפְתוּ חֲשֹׁכֶת מִים עָבִי
שָׁחִקִים.

עֲנֵנֵי כְבוֹד אומרים: אֵף בְּרִי יִטְרִיחַ עָב יִפְיֵץ עָנָן אֹרֹךְ.
רוּחַ אומר: אֲמַר לְצִפּוֹן תִּנִּי וּלְתִימָן אֵל תִּכְלָאִי הִבִּיאִי בְנֵי מֶרְחֹק
וּבְנוֹתֵי מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ.
בְּרָקִים אומרים: בְּרָקִים לְמָטָר עֲשֵׂה מוֹצֵא רוּחַ מְאוֹצְרוֹתָיו.
טל אומר: אֶהְיֶה כְּטַל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִפְרַח כְּשׁוֹשְׁנָה וְיִהְיֶה שֶׁרָשָׁיו כְּלִבְנוֹן.
גִּשְׁמִים אומרים: גִּשְׁם נְדָבוֹת תִּנְיֹף אֱלֹהִים נִחֲלָתְךָ וְנִלְאָה אֶתְּךָ
כּוֹנֵנָתָה.

פרק ג

אֵילָנוֹת שְׁבִשְׁדָּה אומרים: אֲזִי יִרְנְנוּ עֲצֵי הַיַּעַר מִלִּפְנֵי ה' כִּי בָא
לְשָׁפוֹט אֶת הָאָרֶץ.
גִּפְן אומרת: כֹּה אָמַר ה' כְּאֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא הַתִּירוֹשׁ בְּאֲשָׁכּוֹל וְאָמַר אֵל
תִּשְׁחִיתֶהוּ כִּי בִרְכָה בּוֹ כֵּן אֶעֱשֶׂה לְמַעַן עֲבֹדִי לְבִלְתִּי הַשְׁחִית הַכֹּל.
תְּאֵנָה אומרת: נִצֵּר תְּאֵנָה יֹאכֵל פְּרִיָּהּ.
רְמוֹן אומר: כִּפְלַח הָרְמוֹן רִקְתָּךְ מִבְּעַד לְצִמְתָּךְ.
תְּמָר אומר: צִדִּיק כְּתֹמָר יִפְרַח כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה.
תְּפֹיחַ אומר: כְּתִפּוּחַ בְּעֲצֵי הַיַּעַר כֵּן דּוֹדִי בֵּין הַבָּנִים בְּצִלּוֹ חֲמֻדָּתִי
וְיִשְׁבְּתִי וּפְרִיּוֹ מִתּוֹךְ לְחֹכִי.
שִׁבְלַת חֲטִיִּם אומרת: שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת מִמַּעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ ה'.
שִׁבְלַת שְׁעוּרִים אומרת: תִּפְלֶה לְעֵנִי כִּי יַעֲטֹף וְלִפְנֵי ה' יִשְׁפֹּף שִׁיחוֹ.
שָׂאֵר הַשְּׁבוּלִים אומרים: לִבְשׁוֹ כָרִים הִצֵּאָן וְעַמְקִים יַעֲטֹפוּ בָּר
יִתְרוֹעְעוּ אֵף יִשְׁירוּ.
יִרְקוֹת שְׁבִשְׁדָּה אומרים: תִּלְמִיָּה רְוָה נִחַת גְּדוּדֶיהָ בְּרִבְיָיִם תִּמְגְּגָנָה
צִמְחָהּ תִּבְרָךְ.
דְּשָׁאִים אומרים: יְהִי כְבוֹד ה' לְעוֹלָם יִשְׁמַח ה' בְּמַעֲשָׁיו.

פרק ד

תְּרַנְגוּל אֹמֵר: בְּשַׁעַה שְׂבָא הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶצֶל הַצַּדִּיקִים בְּגֶן עֵדֶן
זוֹלָפִים כָּל אֵילָנֵי גֶן עֵדֶן בְּשָׂמִים וּמִרְנָנִים וּמִשְׁבָּחִים וְאֵז גַּם הוּא
מִתְעוֹרֵר וּמִשְׁבַּח.

בְּקוּל רֵאשׁוֹן אֹמֵר: שָׂאוּ שְׁעָרִים רֵאשִׁיכֶם וְהִנֵּשְׂאוּ פִתְחֵי עוֹלָם וַיָּבֹאוּ
מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד. מִי זֶה מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד ה' עֲזִיז וְגִבּוֹר ה' גִּבּוֹר מִלְחָמָה.

בְּקוּל שְׁנִי אֹמֵר: שָׂאוּ שְׁעָרִים רֵאשִׁיכֶם וּשְׂאוּ פִתְחֵי עוֹלָם וַיָּבֹאוּ מֶלֶךְ
הַכְּבוֹד. מִי הוּא זֶה מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד ה' צְבָאוֹת הוּא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד סֵלָה.

בְּקוּל שְׁלִישִׁי אֹמֵר: עֲמְדוּ צַדִּיקִים וְעִסְקוּ בַתּוֹרָה כְּדִי שְׂיִהְיֶה שְׁכָרְכֶם
כְּפוּל לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

בְּקוּל רְבִיעִי אֹמֵר: לִישׁוּעָתָה קוִיִּתִּי ה'.

בְּקוּל חֲמִישִׁי אֹמֵר: עַד מָתִי עֲצֹל תִּשְׁכַּב מָתִי תִקּוּם מִשְׁנָתָה.

בְּקוּל שִׁישִׁי אֹמֵר: אֵל תִּאֶהָב נִשְׁנָה פֶּן תִּנָּרֵשׁ פָּקַח עֵינָיָה שָׁבַע לָחֶם.

בְּקוּל שְׁבִיעִי אֹמֵר: עַתָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת לֵה' הִפְרוּ תוֹרָתָה.

תְּרַנְגִּלַּת אוֹמֶרֶת: נָתַן לָחֶם לְכָל בָּשָׂר כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ.

יוֹנָה אוֹמֶרֶת: כְּסוּס עָגוּר כֵּן אֶצְפָּצֵף אֶהְיֶה כִּיּוֹנָה דָּלוּ עֵינַי לְמָרוֹם
אֲדַנִּי עֲשִׂקָה לִי עֲרִבָנִי.

אוֹמֶרֶת יוֹנָה לִפְנֵי הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם יִהְיוּ מְזוֹנוֹתֵי
מְרוֹרִים כְּזִית בִּידָדָה וְאֵל יִהְיוּ מִתּוֹקִים כְּדָבָשׁ עַל יָדֵי בָשָׂר וְדָם.

נֶשֶׁר אֹמֵר: וְאַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִקִּיצָה לִפְקֹד כָּל
הַגּוֹיִם אֵל תַּחֲנוּן כָּל בִּגְדֵי אָוֶן סֵלָה.

עָגוּר אֹמֵר: הוֹדוּ לֵה' בְּכִנּוֹר בְּנִבְלָה עֲשׂוֹר וַמְרוּ לוֹ.

צִפּוֹר אֹמֵר: גַּם צִפּוֹר מִצָּאָה בֵּית וּדְרוֹר קֵן לָהּ אֲשֶׁר שָׂתָה אֶפְרֹחֶיהָ
אֶת מִזְבַּחוֹתֶיהָ ה' צְבָאוֹת מִלְכִּי וְאֱלֹהֵי.

סְנוּנִית אוֹמֶרֶת: לִמְעַן יִזְמְרָךְ כְּבוֹד וְלֹא יָדָם ה' אֱלֹהֵי לְעוֹלָם אוֹדְךָ.

טְסִית אוֹמֶרֶת: עֲזָרִי מֵעַם ה' עֲשֵׂה שְׂמִים וְאֶרֶץ.

צִיָּה אוֹמֶרֶת: אִוֵּר זָרַע לַצַּדִּיק וּלְיֹשֶׁרִי לֵב שִׁמְחָה.

רִצְפִּי אֹמֵר: נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עָמִי יֹאמֶר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

חֲסִידָה אוֹמֶרֶת: דִּבְרוּ עַל לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וּקְרָאוּ אֵלֶיהָ כִּי מְלָאָה צְבָאָה

כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנָה כִּי לִקְחָה מִיַּד ה' כְּפָלִים בְּכָל חַטֹּאתֶיהָ.
עוֹרֵב אוֹמֵר: מִי יָכִין לְעֵרֵב צִידוֹ כִּי יִלְדִּיו אֵל אֵל יִשְׁנֻעוּ.
זֶרְזִיר אוֹמֵר: וְנוֹדַע בְּגוֹיִם וְרָעַם וְצִאֲצִאִיהֶם בְּתוֹךְ הָעַמִּים כָּל רֵאִיהֶם
 יִכִּירוּם כִּי הֵם זֶרַע בְּרֹךְ ה'.
אֲנֹז שְׁבִיבִית אוֹמֶרֶת: הוֹדוּ לַה' קְרָאוּ בִשְׁמוֹ הוֹדִיעוּ בְּעַמִּים עֲלִילוֹתָיו:
 שִׁירוּ לוֹ זַמְרוּ לוֹ שִׁיחוּ בְּכָל גְּפִלְאוֹתָיו.
אֲנֹז הַבֵּר הַמְּשֹׁטְטֶת בַּמִּדְבָּר כְּשֶׁרוֹאָה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹסְקִים בַּתּוֹרָה
אוֹמֶרֶת: קוֹל קוֹרָא בַּמִּדְבָּר פָּנוּ דֶּרֶךְ יִי יִשְׁרוּ בַּעֲרֻבָה מִסְלָה לְאַלְקִינוּ
 וְעַל מְצִיאוֹת מְזוֹנוֹתֶיהָ בַּמִּדְבָּר אוֹמֶרֶת: אָרוּר הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בְּאֲדָם
 בְּרוּךְ הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בְּיִי וְהִנֵּה יִי מִבְטָחוֹ.
פְּרוֹגִיּוֹת אוֹמְרִים: בְּטָחוּ בַּה' עַד־כִּי בִּיָּה ה' צוֹר עוֹלָמִים.
רַחֲמָה אוֹמֶרֶת: אֲשֶׁר־קָה לָהֶם וְאֶקְבָּצֵם כִּי פְדִיתִים וְרָבוּ כְּמוֹ רָבוּ.
צַפְרֶת כְּרָמִים אוֹמֶרֶת: אֵשָׂא עֵינַי אֶל הַהָרִים מֵאִין יָבֹא עֲזָרִי.
חֲסִיל אוֹמֵר: ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲתָה אַרְוִמְמָךְ אוֹדָה שְׁמָךְ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ פְּלֵא עֲצוֹת
 מִרְחוֹק אֲמוֹנָה אֲמֵן.
שְׁמַמִּית אוֹמֶרֶת: הִלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי שְׁמַע הִלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה.
זָבוּב אוֹמֵר: בְּשַׁעָה שְׁאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹסְקִים בַּתּוֹרָה: קוֹל אֹמֵר קְרָא
 וְאֹמֵר מָה אֶקְרָא כָּל הַבֶּשֶׂר חֲצִיר וְכָל חֲסִדוֹ כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה. יָבֵשׁ חֲצִיר
 נָבֵל צִיץ וְדָבָר אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם. בּוֹרָא גִיב שְׁפָתַיִם שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם
 לְרַחוּק וְלִקְרוֹב אָמַר ה' וְרַפְּאֵתוֹ.
תַּנְיִינִים אוֹמְרִים: הִלְלוּ אֶת ה' מִן הָאָרֶץ תַּנְיִינִים וְכָל תַּהֲמוֹת.
לוֹיִתָּן אוֹמֵר: הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ.
דָּגִים אוֹמְרִים: קוֹל ה' עַל הַמַּיִם אֵל הַכְּבוֹד הִרְעִים ה' עַל מַיִם רַבִּים.
צַפְרִדַּע אוֹמֶרֶת: בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

פרק ה

בַּהֲמָה דָּקָה טְהוֹרָה אוֹמֶרֶת: מִי כַמֶּכָה בְּאֵלֶם ה' מִי כַמֶּכָה נֶאֱדָר
 בַּקֶּדֶשׁ נוֹרָא תְהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פְלֵא.
בַּהֲמָה גֹּסֶה טְהוֹרָה אוֹמֶרֶת: הִרְנִינוּ לֵאלֹהִים עוֹזְנֵנוּ הִרְיָעֵנוּ לֵאלֹהֵי

יַעֲקֹב.

בְּהֵמָה דָּקָה טִמְאָה אוֹמֶרֶת: הִיטִיבָה ה' לטוֹבִים וְלִישָׁרִים בְּלִבּוֹתָם.

בְּהֵמָה גְּסָה טִמְאָה אוֹמֶרֶת: יִגִּיעַ כַּפִּיָּה כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרֶיהָ וְטוֹב לָהּ.

גִּמְלָה אוֹמֶרֶת: ה' מִמָּרוֹם יִשְׁאָג וּמִמַּעוֹן קִדְּשׁוּ יִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ שְׁאֵג יִשְׁאָג עַל בְּנוֹהוּ.

סוֹס אוֹמֶרֶת: הִנֵּה כַּעֲיִנִי עֹבְדִים אֶל יָד אֲדוֹנֵיהֶם כַּעֲיִנִי שֹׁפְחָה אֶל יָד גְּבֻרָתָהּ כִּן עֲיִנִינוּ אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַד שְׁיִחַנְנוּ.

פָּרָד אוֹמֶרֶת: יוֹדוּהָ ה' כָּל מַלְכֵי אֶרֶץ כִּי שָׁמְעוּ אִמְרֵי פִיהָ.

חֲמֹר אוֹמֶרֶת: לָהּ ה' הִגְדִּלָהּ וְהִגְבִּירָהּ וְהִתְפַּאֲרָתָהּ וְהִנְצִיחַ וְהַיְהוֹד כִּי כָל בְּשָׁמִים וּבְאֶרֶץ לָהּ ה' הַמְּמַלְכָהּ וְהַמְתַּנְשָׂא לְכָל לְרֹאשׁ.

שׁוֹר אוֹמֶרֶת: אֲזַי יִשִּׁיר מִשָּׁהּ וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לֵה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא־מֵר אֲשִׁירָהּ לֵה' כִּי גָאָה גָאָה סוֹס וְרָכְבוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם.

חִיּוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה אוֹמְרִים: בְּרוּךְ הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב.

צִבִּי אוֹמֶרֶת: וְאֲנִי אֲשִׁיר עֲזָה וְאֶרְנָן לַבָּקָר חֹסְדָהּ כִּי הָיִיתָ מְשֻׁבָּב לִי וּמָנוֹס בְּיוֹם צָר לִי.

פִּיל אוֹמֶרֶת: מַה גָּדְלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיהָ ה' מֵאֵד עֲמָקוֹ מִחֻשְׁבְּתֶיהָ.

אַרְיֵה אוֹמֶרֶת: ה' כַּגְּבוּר יֵצֵא כְּאִישׁ מִלְחָמוֹת יַעִיר קִנְאָה יָרִיעַ אֶף יִצְרִיחַ עַל אֵיבָיו יִתְגַּבֵּר.

דָּב אוֹמֶרֶת: יִשְׂאוּ מִדְּבַר וְעָרְיוּ חֲצָרִים תִּשָּׁב קֶדֶר יִרְנּוּ יִשְׁבִּי סֹלַע מִרֹאשׁ הָרִים יִצְנַחוּ יִשְׁיִמוּ לֵה' כְּבוֹד וְתִהְיֶה לָהֶם בָּאֵיִם יִגִּידוּ.

זָאֵב אוֹמֶרֶת: עַל כָּל דְּבַר־פֶּשַׁע עַל שׁוֹר עַל חֲמֹר עַל שָׂה עַל שְׁלָמָה עַל כָּל אֲבֹדָה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר כִּי הוּא זֶה עַד הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֹא דְבַר שְׁנִיָּהֶם אֲשֶׁר יִרְשִׁיעַן אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁלַם שְׁנִים לְרַעְיָהוּ.

שׁוּעָל אוֹמֶרֶת: הוּא בָנָה בֵּיתוֹ בְּלֹא צֶדֶק וְעֲלִיּוֹתָיו בְּלֹא מִשְׁפָּט בְּרַעְיָהוּ יַעֲבֹד חָנָם וּפְעָלוֹ לֹא יִתֵּן לוֹ.

זֶרְזִיר אוֹמֶרֶת: רָנְנוּ צְדִיקִים בַּה' לִישָׁרִים נֶאֱנָה תִהְיֶה.

חֲתוּל אוֹמֶרֶת: אֶרְדּוּף אוֹיְבֵי וְאֲשִׁיגֶם וְלֹא אָשׁוּב עַד כָּלוֹתָם.

פרק ו

שָׂרָצִים אוֹמְרִים: יִשְׁמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֲשָׂיו בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן יִגִּילוּ בְּמִלְכָּם.
אֱלִים שְׁבַשְׂרָצִים אוֹמְרִים: אֲשֶׁתָּהּ כְּגֶפֶן פִּרְיָהּ בְּיִרְכָתִי בֵיתָהּ בְּנִידָהּ
כְּשֶׁתִּלִּי זֵיתִים סָבִיב לְיִשְׁלַחְנָהּ.
נֶחֱשׁ אוֹמֵר: סוּמָהּ ה' לְכָל הַנִּפְלִים וְזוֹקֵף לְכָל הַכַּפּוּפִים.
עֶקְרֵב אוֹמֵר: טוֹב ה' לְכָל וְרַחֲמָיו עַל כָּל־מַעֲשָׂיו.
שִׁבְלִיל אוֹמֵר: כָּמוֹ שִׁבְלִיל תִּמְסַ יְהִלֵּךְ נִפְלֵ אִשָּׁת בַּל חֲזוּ שְׁמִשׁ.
נִמְלָה אוֹמֶרֶת: לֵךְ אֵל נִמְלָה עֲצֹל רְאֵה דְרָכֶיהָ וַחֲכָם.
עֶכְבָּר אוֹמֵר: וְאַתָּה צַדִּיק עַל כָּל הַבָּא עָלַי כִּי אֶמֶת עֲשִׂיתָ וְאֲנִי
הִרְשָׁעֵתִי.
חִלְדָּה אוֹמֶרֶת: כָּל הַנִּשְׁמָה תִּהְלֵל יְהִי הַלְלוּיָהּ.
כְּלָבִים אוֹמְרִים: בָּאוּ נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִכְרָעָה נִבְרָכָה לִפְנֵי ה' עֲשֹׁנוּ.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HEAVENS, THE EARTH, AND THE WATER BODIES

THE SONG OF THE HEAVENS



שָׁמַיִם אוֹמְרִים: הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיָדוּ מְגִיד הַרְקִיעַ.
(תהילים יט, ב)

The heavens say: The heavens tell God's honor, and the sky relates His handiwork.

The heavens sing of Hashem's glory.

The sky is blue, the color of majesty¹. Similarly, Hashem's throne is made of blue sapphire.² The brilliant sun crosses the sky daily, benefitting all flora and fauna indiscriminately. The softly glowing moon and stars soften the effect of the dark night. The endless space and countless stars sing of the honor of the Creator.³ The constellations tell of Hashem's reign through the language of astrology.⁴ Clouds tell of Hashem's desire to bestow life upon the land. Across the globe, the grand heavens sing of Hashem's "honor and handiwork".

The song of the heavens should be the background music of Jewish life. The sky above reminds us of our Father and King, Who is always there watching us. We should pray with majesty and live elevated, meaningful lives.

¹ Maharal.

² Therefore, the heavens are "מְסַפְּרִים" – relate – which also has the word-root of "סַפִּיר" – sapphire.

³ Rashi and *Mesaprim Tehilos Hashem*.

⁴ Malbim.



THE SONG OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN



גן עדן אומר: עורי צפון ובואי תימן הפיחי גני יזלו בשמי יבא דודי לגנו ויאכל פרי מגדיו. (שיר השירים ד, טז)

The Garden of Eden says: *[Hashem says,]* “Awaken, north wind, and come, south wind, blow through My garden, causing its fragrances to flow out.”
[The Jewish nation responds,] “Let my Beloved come to His garden and eat His delectable fruits.”

The Garden of Eden sings about the true, unending pleasure experienced after this world.

The Garden of Eden sings how Hashem invites the north and south winds to circulate its divine fragrances for the righteous within it. North is the direction which symbolizes the physical, and its wind delights the soul for righteous usage of the physical world, such as the giving of money for charity.¹ The south wind brings pleasure due for spiritual accomplishments, such as Torah study.² The Garden sings how all are justly rewarded for their unique role in Hashem’s world.³

We should channel all of our faculties and all elements of the world towards the service of Hashem. There is nothing created by the Holy God that is too unholy to be sanctified. Jews, more than any nation in the world, are pleasure-seekers. However, we seek true pleasure, which satisfies the spirit, not the illusion of transitory physical lust.⁴ Then, we can experience the delight of Gan Eden even in this world, and echo its song to the Creator.

¹ Supporting the study of Torah with one’s wealth makes one a partner of the Torah study, as it is written in *Mishlei*, “In the shade of money; in the shade of wisdom.”

² This is why the showbread, from which sustenance came to the world, was situated in the north side of the Bais Hamikdash. The Menora, source of illuminating wisdom, was in the south.

³ ע"פ ילק"ש. See *Shir HaChaim*, *Perek Bshir* and *Li Lishua*.

⁴ ר' Noach Weinberg זצ"ל.

THE SONG OF GEHINNOM



גִּיהִנוֹם אוֹמֵר:
כִּי הִשְׂבִּיעַ נַפְשׁ
שֶׁקָּקָה וְנַפְשׁ
רְעִיבָה מִלֵּא
טוֹב. (תהילים קו, ט)

Gehinnom
says: **“For He
has satisfied a
lustful soul,
and a hungry
soul He has
filled with
goodness.”**

Gehinnom sings of how suffering, too, is a kindness – it cleanses the soul.

After the soul completes its mission in this world, it is hungry for its portion in the World to Come. However, it must first be cleansed in Gehinnom, which is a tremendous kindness, since the soul would otherwise be tainted and imperfect forever.¹ For this reason, Gehinnom sings **“For He has satisfied a lustful soul”**, – Hashem satisfies Gehinnom’s desire for the wicked. **“And a hungry soul He has filled with goodness”**. After the sullied souls are willingly cleansed in Gehinnom, Hashem satiates them with their deserved goodness in Gan Eden, forever.

We should realize that any suffering experienced in this world is surely well-deserved, decreed by the merciful and just God. This realization removes much of the brunt of the suffering. Moreover, if we praise Hashem even for suffering, we allow Gehinnom to join the orchestra of the universe.

¹ Chasam Sofer, Yitzchak Yranen, and others. Alternatively, *Peh Dovid* explains, based on various sources, that “and *the* hungry soul...” refers to Gan Eden, which is hungry for the “good” righteous souls. He adds that those who hunger for Hashem in this world, Hashem will hunger for them in Gan Eden, whereas those who desire sin, the Gehinnom desires them. Cf. Malbim and *Pi Eliyahu*.

THE SONG OF THE DESERT



מִדְבָּר אָמַר: יִשְׁשׁוּם מִדְבָּר וְצִיָּה וְתִגַּל עֲרָבָה וְתִפְרַח כְּחִבְצֵלֶת. (ישעיה ל"א)

The desert says: “The desert and the wasteland will rejoice and the planes will be gladdened. They will sprout like a flower¹.”

The desert sings of spiritual desolation of the Land of Israel in exile which will soon flourish and rejoice.

There is nothing the empty desert ought to sing about. Nevertheless, with its very desolation, it sings how the desert-like land of Israel will transform into a joyful irrigated land.² The more dead a desert appears, the more it sings of Hashem’s ingathering of His nation which for so many centuries seemed hopelessly lost in exile.³

Even when going through a dismal period of life, a Jew must never lose hope. The lower one is, the more magnificent it will be when Hashem draws him close again. Even the desolate patches of life are indispensable components of the Song of Existence. Our music then may seem unpleasant, but to Hashem it is as beautiful as that of the Land of Israel.

¹ Translation of "חבצלת" based on הצומח במקרא. See there further.

² The verse of the desert’s song is actually referring to the land of Israel, which the prophet calls “a desert”.

³ The Jewish people and Edom have a seesaw relationship: one rises and the other falls. Edom's role is to oppress us during our time of exile; thus, our land became utterly desolate in order for them to rise to full power. This means that the more desolate our land is during exile, the more it will sprout gloriously when the seesaw will be reversed. (ע"פ מגילה ו'. ד, ע"פ מהש"ר ב, א, וסוף פי' יפה קול, ובמ"ר כג, ד, ע"פ מגילה ו'.) (ולאום מלאום יאמץ)

THE SONGS OF THE FIELDS



שְׂדוֹת אוֹמְרִים: ה' בְּחָכְמָה יָסַד אֶרֶץ כּוֹיֵן שָׁמַיִם בְּתַבּוּנָה. (משלי ג, יט)
The fields say: "Hashem founded the earth with wisdom;
established the heavens with intuition."

Fields sing of the Godly wisdom behind the heavens, the earth, and their interrelationship.

Hashem fashioned soil with Godly wisdom, infusing it with nutrients necessary to grow all types of vegetation. He hung the heavens above with intuition such that they would continuously bring rains upon the soil and the sun would shine appropriately for each season.

Man is a miniature world. The soul corresponds to the heavens and the body represents the earth. Just as the earth is tiny compared to the astronomically vast heavens, the body is incomparably smaller than the soul. And just as the soil is dependent upon the sky for its life-giving rains, so too the body needs spiritual sustenance in order to actualize its potential.¹

¹ Kol Rina.

THE SONG OF WATER



מים אומרים: לקול תתו המון מים בשמים ויעל נשאים מקצה ארץ.
(ירמיה נא, טז)

The water says: “At the sound¹ of His placing bountiful waters in the heavens, then the clouds are raised from the ends of the earth.”

Water sings of the ingenuity of Hashem’s perpetual system of precipitation.

Water is absolutely essential for all living organisms. Drinkable water comes mostly from rainfall. If not for the kindness of the complex water cycle, water and the life it supports would soon disappear. Therefore, each water drop sings of Hashem’s repetitive formation of rainclouds to provide for His creations.

Hashem brings up water from the ends of the earth to the high heavens in order to provide for the needy. We should be willing to make the much smaller efforts necessary to help out others.

¹ “Sound” is variously interpreted. Either the mass gathering of rainclouds creates a loud sound [Radak], or, alternatively, the sound is the publicizing of Hashem’s greatness [Malbim]. Midrashically, this “קול” alludes to the cry of the lower waters when they were separated from the higher waters at the time of creation [בראשית רבה ה, ד].

THE SONG OF THE SEAS



יָמִים אוֹמְרִים: מְקִלּוֹת מַיִם רַבִּים אֲדִירִים מְשַׁבְּרֵי יָם אֲדִיר בְּמָרוֹם ה'. (תהילים צג, ד)
The seas say: **More than the sounds of the great, mighty waters and the breaking ocean waves, mighty on high is Hashem.**

The seas sing of Hashem's strength and protection.

The mighty oceans sing of Hashem's unconquerable might. He holds back the water from flooding the land, and so too the enemies of Israel from overrunning us.¹ Moreover, the waves may be strong but their strength is only from the wind and the pull of moon – which in turn are controlled by Hashem from up high. So too, the nations are powerless marionettes who discipline us at times, according to Hashem's omnipotent will.

The fact that we are standing on dry land, and that we survive and even thrive in the midst of seventy wolf-like nations, is a constant testimony of Hashem's desire for us to live here on earth. We, too, should hold steadfast to our traditions and ideals, and live in a way that justifies His colossal efforts.

¹ Partially based on Rashi.

THE SONG OF THE RIVERS



נְהָרוֹת אוֹמְרִים: נְהָרוֹת יִמְחָאוּ כָּף, יַחַד הָרִים יִרְנְנוּ. (תהילים צח, ח)
The rivers say: The rivers will clap hands; together, the mountains will
praise.

The rivers sing of joyous future redemption.

The river's song is part of the joyous depiction of the forthcoming redemption, when Hashem will rectify the world with justice. Then, rivers will seem to excitedly clap hands as they stream down the mountainsides. To a smaller degree, they sing of Hashem's dominion which is apparent even today.

The rivers show a profound lesson. Although the waters of the river flow downhill, which could be considered a lessening of their strength and importance, they nonetheless do so happily, irrigating the land and fulfilling their purpose. So too, we should be willing to humble ourselves in order to fulfill the will of our Creator and help people. Even if it involves compromising personal accomplishment, we should do so happily, with the liveliness of the clapping river.

THE SONG OF THE SPRINGS



מְעִינּוֹת אוֹמְרִים: וְשָׁרִים כְּחִלְלִים כָּל

מְעִינֵי בָךְ. (תהילים פז, ו)

The springs say: **The singers and the flutists – all of my wellsprings are for You.**

The springs sing of how the soul naturally flows with praise for its Creator.

This song depicts the glory of the offerings in the Bais Hamikdash. Then, the Levites would sing to the music of flutes and other instruments. King David declared about this, “All my wellsprings are for You!” These compositions emerged from his heart, which he describes as an overflowing spring of praise for the Creator.¹

Spring water flows upwards, out of the ground, contrary to the usual gravitational effect. So too, one’s soul yearns for its source, heavenwards. When it sings to Hashem, it connects with Him. We have but to follow our souls’ natural desires in order to come close to Hashem.



By Andreas Tille

¹ Based on Radak.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOLAR SYSTEM AND THE WATER CYCLE

THE SONG OF THE DAY



יום אומר: יום ליום נביע אמר ולילה ללילה יתנה דעת. (תהילים יט, ג)
The day says: **Day by day** expresses speech and **night by night** relates
comprehension.

The day sings of how Hashem's world and praise are revealed in it.

In the earth's daylight hours, Hashem's creations and doings are visible to us and we constantly bless Him, each day anew. Nights serve to separate the days and give recesses for contemplation and absorption, important because an unending day would result in mental overload. Day by day, our experiences and comprehension of Hashem increases and so does our praise.

Each day is a new creation. Count your blessings, thank Hashem, and let each day sing its own song.

THE SONG OF THE NIGHT



לֵילָה אֹמֵר: לְהַגִּיד בַּבֹּקֶר חֶסֶדְךָ וְאַמּוּנָתְךָ בַּלַּיְלוֹת. (תהילים צב, ג)
The night says: **To tell in the morning of Your kindnesses, and of Your faithfulness by nights.**

Night sings of faith in the coming morning.

When a person goes to sleep, parts of his soul rises back to Heaven and he lies partially dead until Hashem deems fit to restore his soul to him in the morning. Hashem is faithful to us in that He guards our souls and overlooks sins that tainted and damaged it during the past day, hoping for betterment in the morrow.

On a deeper level, the darkness is an analogy for the dark times of a person's life, as well as the dark exile of the nation as a whole. In many ways, our faithful relationship with Hashem at these times is more meaningful than the brilliance of the awaited day itself. We must seek Hashem always. At times we see Him as clear as day. At times we have to remember Him in the darkness of the night.

THE SONG OF THE SUN



שֶׁמֶשׁ אָמַר: שֶׁמֶשׁ יָרַח עָמַד זָבֵלָה לְאוֹר תַּצִּיף יִהְיֶה לְנֶגְהָ בָּרֶקַח תְּנִיתָד.

(חֲבִיקוֹק ג', י"א)

The sun says: The sun and moon stood in their places, by the light of Your arrows they shall go, by the glow of Your spear-point.

The sun sings how glory belongs only to the Creator.

The sun is amongst the greatest of Hashem's creations. It is essential to all life and controls even the dimension of time. For this reason, gentiles worship it, even to present times. The sun therefore refuses to rise each day until Hashem forces it to do so.¹ Its song is that its splendor belongs not to it, but to its Creator.

We, too, should shine with all of our talents, yet attribute our successes to Hashem. Thereby we fill the world with Hashem's glory, and with the sun's song.

¹ The Talmud (*Nedarim* 39b) records how at the time of Korach's revolt, the sun and moon protested Moshe's honor and refused to shine, but rather "stood in their places". Hashem chastised them that every day when the idol-worshippers bow down to them, they shine and do not protest Hashem's honor, and now they protest a human's honor. From then on, they refuse to shine in a way that detracts from Hashem's honor and He has to smite them with "arrows and spears" so that they run their daily courses. It is possible that this smiting is visible in the form of sunspots, meteor strikes, etc. The song belongs to the sun, and not the moon, since the sun is the primary luminary and idol.

THE SONG OF THE MOON



יָרַח אָמַרְתָּ: עָשֵׂה יָרַח לְמוֹעֲדִים שֶׁשֶׁשׁ יָדַע מְבֹאֵאוֹ. (תהילים קד, יט)

The Moon says: “He created the Moon for festivals; the Sun knows it setting.”

The moon sings of self-effacement and humble dependency upon Hashem.

The moon’s light is but a dim reflection of the sun that is only significant when the sun sets. It waxes and wanes in a monthly cycle that forms the lunar calendar necessary for the sanctification of the festivals.¹

The moon sings that it was created not for its own light, but rather to indicate the meetings between Hashem and His nation. On a deeper level, the moon is symbolic of the Jewish nation whose calendar is led by it.² Like the moon, our brilliance is only to the extent that we reflect Hashem’s light and teachings. Our history therefore has ups and downs corresponding to our relationship with Hashem. Although we all but disappeared when we were exiled, we will yet wax to a full moon and radiate the world with Hashem’s light.

¹ בראשית רבה ויחי ו, א.

² סוכה כט.

THE SONG OF THE STARS



כוכבים אומרים: אתה הוא ה' לבדך אתה עשית את השמים שמי
השמים וכל צבאם הארץ וכל אשר עליה הימים וכל אשר בהם ואתה
מחיה את כלם וצבא השמים לך משתחווים. (נחמיה ט, ו)
The stars say: **It is You Who is Hashem – alone. You created
all of the heavens and all of their hosts, the Earth and all on
it, the seas and all within then and You grant life to all and
the heavenly hosts bow to You.**

The stars sing of Hashem's sole control over all existence.

Hashem controls the natural world through the astrology of the stars. The varying arrangements of the stars channel different flows of blessing from Hashem: life, wealth, might, progeny, and so on.¹ The uncountable stars shine the praise of the immeasurable God, Who guides them each according to His singular will. The constellations constantly bow in unity in the direction of the western horizon, towards Hashem's Shechina, as if to declare: "It is You Who is Hashem – alone."

We should not let powerful people and difficult situations confuse us. It is Hashem alone who control all. He can help us through any situation – the sky is not the limit.

¹ The Vilna Gaon writes at the beginning of *Aderes Eliyahu* that "the Shefah [flows] from Hashem change according to the changing of the stars. One brings life, another wealth, another might, another progeny and so on. The amount of Shefah is according to the number of stars. Hashem is one and He grants to each star what it is fitting to receive..."

THE SONG OF THE CLOUDS



עבים אומרים: יָשַׁת חֹשֶׁךְ סָתְרוּ סְבִיבוֹתָיו סָפְתוּ חֹשְׁכַת מַיִם עָבֵי שָׁמַיִם.

(תהלים יח, יב)

The clouds say: **He places darkness as His concealment, around Him
His shelter, darkness of water, clouds of the heavens.**

The clouds sing of how darkness, too, can be a blessing.

Clouds bear life-giving water. Paradoxically, the more water they contain, the darker and gloomier they are, blocking the rays of the sun. Rain itself is a notorious nuisance. The truth is that darkness and discomfort are blessings in disguise. Were one to live a life free of discomfort, he would become spoilt and would never reach the heights of greatness and spiritual pleasure Hashem created him to reach. The clouds sing that Hashem “places darkness as His concealment” in order to discipline and educate.

When a person goes through a struggle and clouds form above him, one thing can be known for sure: it’s going to rain. A wise man knows to see all of life for its potential and maintain happiness at all times.

THE SONG OF THE CLOUDS OF GLORY¹



עֲנֵי כְבוֹד אֱמָרִים: אֵף בְּרֵי יִטְרִית עָב יִפְיֵץ עָנָן אֲרֹר. (איוב לז, יא)

The clouds of glory say: **Even in clarity He forms clouds; the clouds shined His light.**

The Clouds of Glory sing of Hashem's fatherly care for His chosen nation.

When the Jewish people wandered through the wilderness, Hashem surrounded them on all sides with His Clouds of Glory in order to protect them from the elements. An additional Cloud floated ahead of them to lead them. They flattened mountains and killed dangerous snakes and scorpions in their way. They sing how, contrary to rainclouds which are formed from moisture and block light, Clouds of Glory are formed “even in clarity”, without moisture, and “shined His light” upon the Jewish nation.²

We are obliged to never forget how Hashem sheltered us in the desert. We should likewise care for fellow Jews that way He did and still does for us. Thereby, reveal Hashem's glory in His world.

¹ The מספרים תהילות ה' and others interpret the song differently than presented here, explaining the verse at face value, that it refers to natural clouds, but specifically to lighter ones that do not contain rain. Their role is to shine Hashem's glory. They are depicted in the picture above.

² ברייתא דמלאכת המשכן: “Throughout the 40 years in the desert, the nation did not require sunlight.” The Mechilta [Beshalach] and Avos D'Rabbi Nasan [כה] indicate that the Clouds of Glory are still extant.

THE SONG OF THE WIND



רוח אומר: אמר לצפון
תני ולתימן אל תכלאי
הביאי בני מרחוק ובנותי
מקצה הארץ. (ישעיה מג, ו)

The wind says: Say to
the north wind,
“Give!” and to the
south wind, “Do not
withhold.” Bring My
sons from afar and My
daughters from the
ends of the Earth.

The winds sing that Hashem's will is unseen, yet unstoppable.

Agents of Hashem's will, winds move unrestrained to perform the desire of their Creator. They play an essential role in the process of precipitation and in the dispersing of plant seeds for propagation, amongst many other benefits to the world. They sing of Hashem's limitless control of His world, and especially the awesome ingathering of exiles, portrayed as winds speedily bringing in ships of His people back home from the ends of the earth.¹

When we determinedly fulfill the will of the Almighty without compromising, the whistle of the wind becomes powerful divine music.



¹ Adapted partially from the commentary *Mesaprim Tehilos Hashem*. In the Garden of Eden, too, the scents of pleasure will be circulated by the winds.

THE SONG OF THE LIGHTNING



בְּרָקִים אֹמְרִים: בְּרָקִים לְמַטֵּר עָשָׂה מוֹצֵא רוּחַ מֵאוֹצְרוֹתָיו. (תהילים קלה, ז).
Lightning says: **Lightning He made for rains, He takes out wind from His storehouses.**

Lightning and its accompanying thunder express Hashem's omnipotence.

Hashem created lightning and their earthshaking thunder in order to humble man and straighten crookedness in his heart.¹ It guides us to live responsibly, knowing that it is Hashem Who watches all and Whose might fills the world. Only after we are “struck” and “enlightened” by lightning, can rains be showered.

We should live with awe of the Creator and fulfill His Mitzvos with reverence. Only the humble are fitting receptacles for the bounty that Hashem wishes to bestow upon us.

¹ Talmud [לגבי רעמים. ע"ע אוה"ח על מכת ברד].

THE SONG OF THE DEW



טל אומר: אֶהְיֶה כְּטֵל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִפְרֹחַ כְּשִׁשְׁוֹנָה וְיִבֶּן שָׁרָשָׁיו כְּלִבְנוֹן. (הושע יד, ו)
The dew says: “I will be like dew for Yisrael, they will sprout like a flower and they will strike roots like cedars of Lebanon.”

The dew sings of Hashem's desire to bestow constant blessings upon His nation, which will only be fully possible in the future redemption.

Dew is essential for the growth of plant-life in the same way that rain is. However, unlike rain which is only beneficial in the right season and amount, and even then it is bothersome, dew is a welcome blessing throughout the year. It sings of how Hashem will nurture His nation everlastingly in their future rebirth.¹ Then, we will “sprout like a flower”, which is cone-shaped and uniquely receptive of dew², accepting Hashem's invitation to return. We will “strike roots like the cedars of Lebanon”, performing complete Teshuva and sprouting in towering glory.

Like the dew, we should nurture relationships perpetually and make them blossom. When we do, we are setting the tone for the coming redemption.

¹ Based on Radak. On a deeper level, Hashem is promising to be the one to take the first step to renew His relationship with His nation, in the same way that dew forms without arousal from below, unlike rain which only falls after vapor has risen and formed clouds. *Knaf Renanim*.

² Generalized translation of "שושנה". See צומח במקרא for various opinions, including rose and lily. According to the translation of rose, it should be noted that unlike other flowers, on the surface of rose petals there are microscopic, wax-less spiky protrusions which cause dewdrop to stick between them. *Feng, L., et al. Langmuir 24, 4114 - 4119 (2008)*.

THE SONG OF THE RAIN



גְּשָׁמִים אֹמְרִים: גֶּשֶׁם נְדָבוֹת תְּנִיף אֱלֹהִים נַחֲלָתְךָ וְנִלְאָה אֶתָּה כּוֹנֵנָתָה.
(תהלים סח, י)

The rains say: “Voluntary rain You wave, Hashem, Your heritage that is weak You establish.”

The rain sings about how Hashem compassionately nourishes us even when we are not entirely worthy.

The Torah clearly spells out that life-giving rainfall depends upon the nation’s loyalty to Hashem. When it is withheld, it is a sign for the nation to repent and to pray. Even so, frail man is far from perfect. When the rain falls, each drop sings that the rains of "אלוקים" – God of justice – are in truth voluntary. He has mercy on “His heritage that is weak” from hunger, even if they are not righteous enough, to shower them with gifts of rain.

When we voluntarily open our hearts and palms in compassion to the needy, Hashem – also voluntarily and uncritically – opens His floodgates of blessing wide-open, and the song of the rain resounds through the heavens and the earth.

CHAPTER THREE

TREES AND VEGETATION

THE SONG OF THE TREES OF THE FIELD



אֵילֹנוֹת שֶׁבְּשָׂדֶה אוֹמְרִים: אֲזַיִּרְנְנוּ עֵצֵי הַיַּעַר מִלִּפְנֵי ה' כִּי בָא לְשְׁפוט אֶת הָאָרֶץ.
(דברי הימים א', טז, לה)

The tress of the field say: **Then will sing the trees of the forest, from before Hashem, for He has come to judge the Earth.**

Trees sing of Hashem's awesome presence in His world and hint to the Day of Judgement, when even the barren will sing in full concert.

Trees can tower mightily and live longer than any other organism on the planet. When they rustle excitedly in the invisible wind, they sing of Hashem's unseen presence in this world. Their song is an excerpt from the description of the joy that will reverberate throughout the world in the future when Hashem will judge His universe, fix its faults, and rule over all in majesty and benevolence. In Eretz Yisrael, even the barren trees will once again bear fruit as they did before the curse of Adam.¹ Then the titanic trees will shake with a full expression of their song

Man is compared to trees since we produce with our endeavors, bear children, and sprout Torah similar to the way that trees grow fruit. No matter how mighty, respected and confident one is, he should sway to the will of Hashem like the trees and perform His Mitzvos with rustling excitement. Although the spiritually impoverished generations prior to the coming of the Mashiach are likened to barren trees², we too will experience a national rebirth – soon! – when Hashem rectifies His world and our song will finally be fully expressed.

¹ *Kesuvos* 112: י, ספרא בחוקותי י, 1. Cf. Yitzchak Yeranen. The concept of them singing through rustling was drawn from the parallel between this verse and the shaking of the Lulav.

² Maharsha *Kesuvos* 112:

THE SONG OF THE GRAPEVINE



גִּפֶּן אָמְרָת: כֹּה אָמַר ה' פֶּאֶשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא הַתִּירוֹשׁ בְּאֵשְׁכּוֹל וְאָמַר אֵל תִּשְׁחִיתֶהוּ כִּי בִרְכָה בּוֹ כֵּן
אֶעֱשֶׂה לְמַעַן עֲבָדֵי לְבִלְתִּי הַשְׁחִית הַכֹּל. (ישעיה סה, ח)

The grapevine says: "So says Hashem, in the same way a wine-bearing grape is found on a cluster and one says "Do not destroy it (the cluster), as there is blessing within it", so I will do for the sake of My servants, not to destroy all."

The grapevine sings of Hashem's love for His nation, focusing on our latent goodness.

Hashem compares His nation to a grapevine. Even if a vine consists mostly of rotten grapes, and the vine itself is flimsy and useless, the farmer will still tend to it for the sake of the wine that can be made from the good grapes after they are harvested, squeezed, and fermented. So too, Hashem declares that although the majority of our nation are not yet fitting to be a blessing to Him as we were designed to be, He shall not to discard us. He derives sufficient satisfaction from the righteous alone, and He patiently waits for the entire nation to repent.¹

When all the grapes of our nation are harvested, and its wine produced, the blessing, joy, and song that will come from it will fill the world. Until then, we should see the good in everyone, ourselves included, and the song of the grapevine can be heard even today.

¹ ע"פ רד"ק, שירת החיים, ובית האלוקים. The *Siach Yitzchak* explains that just like grapes are cultivated for their wine, even though many misuse it, and only some drink in healthy measure, so too Hashem will save a city for the sake of the righteous who will utilize it correctly.

THE SONG OF THE FIG TREE



תֵּאֲנָה אוֹמֶרֶת: נֹצֵר תֵּאֲנָה יֹאכֵל פְּרִיָּהּ. (משלי, כז, יח)

The fig-tree says: “The protector of the fig-tree shall eat its fruit.”

The fig tree sings How Hashem rewards the diligent and conscientious.

The fig is a particularly fragile fruit in that each needs to be guardedly picked as soon as it ripens in order to avoid infestation. This is an analogy for the study of Torah. One who wishes to truly acquire it must diligently keep to his studies daily.¹

Life is a quest for knowledge of Hashem and a training ground to emulate His ways. This does not take place overnight. Man is granted many decades because he needs much time to slowly perfect himself. The key is to hold on to every day in succession, consistently building more. Only one who dances to this tune will enjoy the fruits of his labor.

¹ Malbim.

THE SONG OF THE POMEGRANATE TREE



רמון אומר: כְּפֶלֶח הָרְמוֹן רִקְתָּךְ
מִבְּעַד לְצִמְתְּךָ.
(שיר השירים, ד, ג)

The pomegranate-tree says: “Like
a slice of pomegranate is the
appearance of your cheekbones,
behind your veil¹.”

The pomegranate sings of the innumerable Mitzvos and merits of every member of Hashem's nation.

This song is an excerpt from Shir Hashirim, in which Hashem praises the Jewish nation and describes their qualities with an analogy of a flawlessly beautiful bride. He describes her cheekbones as blushed, the color of a pomegranate.² The figurative intention of this praise is that the Jewish nation is filled with 613 Mitzvos in the same way that the pomegranate contains hundreds of pulpy seeds.³ It has a characteristic crown on its top, like the crown of the Torah.⁴ It sings that even “a slice of pomegranate”, that is to say, even a Jew who only manages to fulfill a “slice” of the Torah, still boasts innumerable “seeds”. Each seed is edible in of itself, and contains untold future potential.⁵

Even if we have merited to amass Torah and Mitzvos, we should still retain our modesty like a bride hides behind her veil – just as each pomegranate seed is covered within its husk. So, too, we should appreciate the hidden greatness of every single Jew. Each pomegranate is filled with song of Hashem's love for His entire nation.

¹ R' Saadya Gaon and others. Cf. Rashi who translates differently, apparently supported by the Midrash.

² “Cheekbones” is from Rashi, explaining that they are depicted as round and red like the exterior of a pomegranate. See Bava Metziah 84a, which apparently understands that it refers to the shiny red, interior seeds. Cf. other commentaries who identify “רקתך” differently.

³ Malbim writes that it has 613 seeds, which is apparently an approximation. The Lechem Rav points out that רימון is the Gematria of 306, half of 613, symbolizing that even half a Jew has uncountable seeds.

⁴ Original understanding.

⁵ In greater detail, the Midrash expounds from the word “רקתך” that even the “ריקים”, relatively empty Jews, contain Mitzvos like the pomegranate. The *Kol Rina* explains that “behind your braids” means that they modestly cover their merits, like the pomegranate is covered with its husk. Alternatively, the Vilna Gaon explains that just as the upper face is bare of hair, they are bare of Torah. Nevertheless, they are covered over “behind your ties of hair” which symbolizes how the empty ones heed the teachings of the wise.

THE SONG OF THE DATE PALM



תָּמָר אָמַר: צַדִּיק כְּתָמָר יִפְרֹחַ כְּאַרְז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגָּה. (תהילים צב, יג)

The date-palm says: “The righteous man will sprout like date-palm;
like a cedar in Lebanon he will grow sturdily.”

The date palm sings of how Hashem’s nation towers spiritually since they love only Him.

The date-palm is a symbol of the Jewish people. It has only one heart in its center, and it therefore grows in only one direction: heavenwards. So too, the Jewish nation have only one heart for their Father in heaven.¹ Other trees, however, have multiple hearts and grow in all directions. The single-minded devotion of the date-palm empowers it to tower over other trees.² So too, the righteous rise proudly and produce date-like nutritious fruits full of sweetness.

We cannot guarantee that we will succeed on any particular task in life, but we have to ensure that we are at least headed in the right direction, and – eventually – we will assuredly reach the top. We have but to follow our souls heavenward, rising with song.

¹ Talmud Sukka. Although the palm is a symbol for the Jewish people, it is symbolic of the righteous in particular. See Midrash Rabba (א במדבר רבה ג, א) for more on the symbolism of the date-palm.

² Date-palms can reach more than 20 meters tall (*Wikipedia*). The song compares the righteous to the cedar, too, since the date-palm has a negative characteristic that if felled, it will not regrow. However, the cedar was not used to symbolize the righteous by itself since although it grows even taller than the date-palm, it does not bear fruit.

THE SONG OF THE APPLE TREE



תפוח אומר: כְּתִפּוֹת בְּעֵצִי הַיָּעַר
כִּן דּוֹדֵי בֵּין הַבָּנִים בְּצֵלוֹ חֲמֻדָּתִי
וַיִּשְׁבְּתִי וּפְרִיּוֹ מְתוֹק לְחֵפִי.

(שיר השירים, ב, ג)

The apple tree says: “Like an apple tree amongst the forest trees, so is my beloved amongst the young men. In his shade I desired and sat, and his fruit was sweet to my palate.”

The apple tree sings about the sweetness of Torah living and how Hashem's shelter is preferable to any worldly comforts.

The apple tree has sweet fruit, but it has comparably less shade than many other trees. It sings of how the Jewish nation chose to accept the Torah for the sweetness of its fruit, even though it is a lifestyle that involves hard work and little shade. This is unlike the other nations who refused the Torah, preferring instead the comforts of this world which is like a fruitless, shady tree.¹ It also sings of our trust in Hashem in accepting His Torah without inquiring as to its contents, in the same way the apples begin to grow before their protective leaves have finished growing.²

Any discomforts involved in performing the Mitzvos are overshadowed by our faith in the unimaginable eternal reward, coupled with the pleasantness of serving the Living God.³ When we cling to Him as we did when we leapt to receive the Torah, He takes full care of His nation. The secular dream of idly enjoying life in the shade can be enticing, but the sweetness of the apple's song clarifies doubt and removes temptation.

¹ R' Chaim Kanievsky quotes the Midrash [שיר השירים רבה ב, ב] recording that the apple starts to sprout in Nisan and finishes growth after 50 days in Sivan. This represents the 50 days from the Exodus in Nisan until the giving of the Torah in Sivan.

² Talmud Shabbos (פז.) according to Ben Yehoyada. See Targum and Tosafos, who identify the Tapuach referred to in this verse as the Esrog. Our translation, apple, follows the usual usage.

³ Midrash Chazis, explained by Sefer Ha'ikarim [א,ג], quoted in Nachalei Dvash.

THE SONG OF THE WHEAT STALK



שְׁבֹלֶת חֲטִים אוֹמֶרֶת: שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת מִמַּעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ ה'.

(תהילים קל)

The wheat stalk says: “A song of ascents, from the depths
I call out to you, Hashem.”

Wheat sings of how Hashem raises from the depths to the heights.

The wheat kernel is planted deep within the soil, dark and far from life.¹ The seed remains buried throughout the cold winter, only sprouting in the summer. It sings that sometimes one has to descend to the depths of suffering in order to reach the heights. Even then, when it matures to proud fruition with countless life-giving grains, the weighted stalks bend over, in seeming humility.²

The rebirth of the apparently rotting seedling is an analogy. No matter how impure a person may become as a result of sin and spiritual stagnation, the center of his heart remains untainted.³ A difficult period in life is not a reason to halt prayer and communication with Hashem. In the depths, it is time to call from the pure depths of the heart. Greatness awaits.

¹ בראשית רבה יג, יט. Its roots can penetrate up to 50 Amos deep.

² Based on זמרת השמים והארץ. It continues to grow in prominence as it assumes the form of bread, the most important of foods. We hold up the bread with ten fingers and recite a ten-worded Bracha, corresponding to the ten procedures by which the wheat grain has to be processed before it reaches completion.

³ Maharash. This is particularly so regarding the wheat kernel, which is pristinely white in its center but covered by coarse chaff. (Nachalas Dvash)

THE SONG OF THE BARLEY STALK



שִׁבֹּלֶת שְׁעוּרִים אֹמְרָת:
תִּפְלֶה לְעָנִי כִּי יִעֲטֶף
וְלִפְנֵי ה' יִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׁיחוֹ.
(תהלים קב)

The barley stalk says:
“A prayer of the poor man
as he bends over,
and he pours
out his supplication
before Hashem.”

The barley stalk sings of Hashem's attentiveness to the prayers of the poor and broken-hearted.

The barley grain is associated with lowliness. It is bare of chaff and appears uncovered and unprotected, resembling a poor man. It is usually grown only for animal fodder, and not for standard human consumption. Therefore, it is not offered in the Bais Hamikdash except to symbolize a lowly and unrefined state, such as by the Omer offering prior the receiving of the Torah on Shavuot.¹

Yet, it is with this very inferiority that the barley stalk sings of the ideal stance of prayer: humble, vulnerable, and dependent upon Hashem, like “a poor man as he bends over, and before Hashem he pours out his supplication.”²

¹ It is also the grain of the offering of the lowly Sotah [allegedly adulterous wife who is suspected of animalistic behavior].

² *Kol Rina*.

THE SONG OF THE ORDINARY STALKS



שָׂאֵר הַשְּׂבּוּלִים אוֹמְרִים: לְבָשׁוּ כָרִים הַצֵּאֵן וְעִמְקִים יַעֲטֹפוּ בָר יִתְרוֹעְעֻ אֶף יִשְׁרָאוֹ. (תהלים סה,
(ד)

The other stalks say: **“It [the meadow] will be clothed with sheep, and the valleys cloaked with grain – they trumpet and even sing.”**

Ordinary stalks sing of the glory of so-called ordinary people.

Wheat and barley are offered in the Bais Hamikdash, but other grains, such as oats, rye, and spelt, apparently lack any connection to holiness. Nonetheless, they too provide sustenance for Hashem’s creatures – a no less essential role. When their stalks ripen and harden, “they trumpet and even sing” as the wind blows against them.¹

In the same way that grain-types vary in their refinement and capacity for holiness, people differ in their status of society, wealth, Torah knowledge, and role in life. Some are so devoted to the Torah that they live in poverty; for others, their primary attachment to Hashem is by supporting poor Torah scholars with their wealth. Everyone fills a unique purpose of some sort in Hashem’s universe. Their song rises equally, in a symphony orchestra to the Creator.²

¹ Radak. Alternatively, “they trumpet and also sing” is a metaphoric expression of the joy the grains bring. See also Rashi who explains that it refers to the jubilation of the people upon witnessing the successful growth of their crops.

² *Perek B'Shir*. Perhaps this is inferred by the words “אֶף יִשְׁרָאוֹ”, that they too sing in the same way as wheat and barley.

THE SONG OF THE VEGETABLES OF THE FIELD



יִרְקוֹת שְׂבִשְׂדָּה אוֹמְרִים: תִּלְמִיךָ רוּנָה נַחַת גְּדוּדֶיךָ בְּרִבְיִים תִּמְלֹגְנָה צִמְחָה
תִּבְרֹךְ. (תהלים סה, יא)

The vegetables in the field say: “**Its furrows You satiate, descending to its grooves, with raindrops You saturate it, its sprouts You bless.**”

Vegetables sing of Hashem’s generous nourishment and support of His creations.

Vegetables require constant watering to maintain moisture and to provide for their rapid growth.¹ They lay submerged in fields and are watered by Hashem Himself. Vegetables are menaced by the attacks of countless insects that creep upon and within the soil. When they survive and ripen to plump fruition, they sing about their justified dependency upon Hashem.

We need to only open our eyes and not deny that we, too, are truly fragile and constantly dependent upon Hashem. There is reason enough to thank Him every day and every hour. He cares for our wellbeing and listens for our song.

¹ They need more rain than trees do as they grow anew monthly. Malbim.

THE SONG OF THE GRASSES¹



דְּשָׂאִים אֹמְרִים יְהִי כְבוֹד ה' לְעוֹלָם יִשְׁמַח ה' בְּמַעֲשָׁיו. (תהילים קד, לא)

The grasses says: **“Let the glory of Hashem be forever, let Hashem rejoice in His handiwork.”**

Grasses sing that Hashem's world is only beautiful when each being lives according to its individuality.

When Hashem beautified the face of His world with a diversity of grass species, each sprouted individually and distinctively, even though they had not been commanded to not intermingle. Thereupon, the ministering angel sang, “Let the glory of Hashem be forever, let Hashem rejoice in His handiwork.”²

Each person should to live his life without comparing with others. Simply by fulfilling the unique role Hashem has designed for you, Hashem's glory is revealed and He rejoices in His handiwork. Each Jew is a player in our national symphony orchestra, a singer of praise to the Creator. Each has to read the notes and play the part that nobody else is going to play for him.

¹ ע' ילקוט הצמחים ישרשי לשה"ק. "דשא" may include all kinds of spouting vegetation.

² ילק"ש ברשית א, יב.

CHAPTER FOUR

BIRDS, FLYING INSECTS, AND AQUATIC BEINGS

THE SONG OF THE ROOSTER



תִּרְנָגוּל אוֹמֵר: בְּשִׁעָה שְׁבָא
הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶצֶל
הַצַּדִּיקִים בְּגֵן עֵדֶן זֹלֵפִים
כָּל אֵילָנֵי גֵן עֵדֶן בְּשָׁמִים
וּמִרְנָנִים וּמִשְׁבָּחִים וְאִזְ גַּם
הוּא מִתְעוֹרֵר וּמִשְׁבַּח.
בְּקוֹל רִאשׁוֹן אוֹמֵר: שְׂאוּ
שְׁעִירִים רִאשֵׁיכֶם וְהִנֵּשְׂאוּ
פִתְחֵי עוֹלָם וַיָּבֹא מֶלֶךְ
הַכְּבוֹד. מִי זֶה מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד

ה' עֲזוּז וְגִבּוֹר ה' גִּבּוֹר מִלְחָמָה. (תהילים כד, ז ח) בְּקוֹל שְׁנֵי אוֹמֵר: שְׂאוּ שְׁעִירִים רִאשֵׁיכֶם
וַיָּבֹאוּ פִתְחֵי עוֹלָם וַיָּבֹא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד. מִי הוּא זֶה מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד ה' צְבָאוֹת הוּא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד
סֵלָה. (שם ט ט) בְּקוֹל שְׁלִישִׁי אוֹמֵר: עֲמָדוּ צַדִּיקִים וְעִסְקוּ בַּתּוֹרָה כְּדֵי שִׁיְהִיָּה שְׂכָרְכֶם כְּפוֹל
לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. בְּקוֹל רְבִיעִי אוֹמֵר: לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קוִיֵּיתִי ה'. (בראשית מט, יח) בְּקוֹל חֲמִישִׁי
אוֹמֵר: עַד מָתַי עֶצֶל תִּשְׁכַּב מָתַי תִּקּוּם מִשְׁנָתְךָ. (משלי ו, יט) בְּקוֹל שִׁישִׁי אוֹמֵר: אֵל תִּתְּהֵב
שְׁנָה פֶן תִּנְרָשׁ פִּקְח עֵינֶיךָ שִׁבְעֵי לָחֶם. (משלי כ, יג) בְּקוֹל שְׁבִיעִי אוֹמֵר: עַתָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת לֵה'
הַפְּרוּ תוֹרָתְךָ. (תהילים קיט, קכו)

The rooster says: At the time that Hashem enters to be with the righteous in Gan Eden, all trees of Gan Eden emit aromatic spices and sing and praise, and then the rooster too awakens and praises.

In the first call it says: **Raise, gates, your heads, and let the eternal entrances be raised, and let the King of glory enter. Who is the King of glory? Hashem, strong and mighty, Hashem mighty warrior.** In the second call it says: **Raise, gates, your heads, and raise, eternal entrances, and let the King of glory enter. Who is He, the King of glory? Hashem Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory, Selah!** In the third call it says: **Rise, righteous, and involve yourselves in Torah study in order that your reward be doubled in the World to Come.** In the fourth call it says: **For Your salvation I yearn, Hashem!** In the fifth call it says: **Until when shall you lie down, lazy man, when will you rise from your sleep?** In the sixth call it says: **Do not love sleep lest you become impoverished. Open your eyes, be satiated with bread.** In the seventh call it says: **It is a time to act for the sake of Hashem; they have annulled Your Torah.**

The rooster sings of the virtue of waking up early, even before the day has begun.

The rooster crows every hour from midnight to daybreak, which is a period of particular Divine favor.¹ Depending on what time it calls, it is announcing an increasingly urgent wake-up to Torah scholars², and it bears a similar message to all Jews. In the **first two** calls, it directs the Heavenly gates to rise for Hashem to enter.³ At the **third** hour, it calls to those still sleeping, “Rise, righteous, and involve yourselves in Torah study”, since it is the onset of the third part of the night when Divine favor increases.⁴ The **fourth** call takes place three hours before daybreak. It calls out that in the merit of Torah study at night we will be redeemed from this exile.⁵ Correspondingly, we are taught that the final Messianic war will take place during the three hours before dawn on Hoshana Raba. The **fifth** call, two hours before daybreak, heralds the preparation for prayer, which will commence in one more hour.⁶ The **sixth** hour is the time to leave for Davening, and it calls that excessive sleep in the morning is one of the things that impoverish a person and remove him from the world. The **seventh** call is “It is a time to act for the sake of Hashem” because it is now daytime, the time appropriate for performing all of the mitzvos whose set time is daytime.

In our urban societies, we no longer rise to the call of the rooster, yet its song shall not be silenced. Its very existence is a daily reminder to awaken and to waken others, to rise and live alive. In truth, accomplishment is a lot more energizing than unnecessary sleep. Even during daytime hours, many slumber without sleeping.⁷ It is only the truly “living” who enjoy and inherit the world. We should particularly prioritize the all-important Mitzvah of Torah study, which delights both Hashem and man. Every time we rise bright and early to make the most of our day, the song of the rooster has been “heard”.

¹ *Zohar*, quoted by R' Chaim Kanievsky, upon whom most of our commentary is based. The *Zohar* primarily refers to the celestial rooster. It, in turn, awakens the roosters on earth, which do not necessarily crow every hour. Most crow at around daybreak and some crow a few hours beforehand. Today's roosters are additionally unsynchronized due to nighttime urban lighting. Regardless of the exact time of crowing, all roosters are singing the same general message as the celestial rooster.

² The practice of waking up before daybreak to engage in Torah study was more common amongst Torah scholars before the advent of the light-bulb. Then, people would go to sleep at nightfall and complete their night's sleep by daybreak.

³ R' Chaim Kanievsky explains, based on the Talmud, that Hashem goes first to the lower Bais Hamikdash and then ascends to the upper Bais Hamikdash. Hence the double call of שמו שערות, corresponding the two מקדש.

⁴ ע"פ זר זרב א, ט.

⁵ Bais Elokim.

⁶ The earliest time of wearing Tallis and Tefillin is approximately one hour before daybreak. Therefore, the rooster calls two hours before daybreak to give people an hour to prepare themselves.

⁷ See R' Noach Weinberg's 48 Ways to Wisdom, "מיעוט שינה".

THE SONG OF THE HEN



תְּרַנֵּנָה אוֹמֶרֶת:
נָתַן לָחֶם לְכָל
בָּשָׂר כִּי לְעוֹלָם
חֶסֶדּוֹ.
(תהילים קלז, כה)

The hen says:
“He gives food
to all flesh for
His kindness is
forever.”

The hen sings that Hashem nourishes all of His creatures with kindness and compassion.

The highly prolific hen sings through its faith in Hashem to provide food for its hatchlings.¹ It also praises Hashem’s kind provision of sustenance by its being a large, almost flightless bird which is conveniently bred for food. Moreover, its daily eggs are compacted with nutrients. With its existence it sings: “He gives food to all flesh, for His kindness is forever.”

Hashem created the world to do kindness. At times, Hashem has to maintain law and order by disciplining us and withholding His goodness, and His kindness is hidden. Nonetheless, one kindness remains unquestionable: His provision of food for all His creatures, each according to its need and desire. This casts light on other, less obvious, kindnesses. When we thank Hashem for satiating us, and also practice similar benevolence, we too sing that “His kindness is forever”.

¹ *Knaf Renana* quoted in *Nachalei Dvash*. Hens lay eggs daily, a model of how Hashem provides sustenance daily.

THE SONG OF THE DOVE¹



יוֹנָה אוֹמֶרֶת: כְּסוֹס עֶגוּר כֵּן אֶצְפָּץ אֶהְיֶה כִּיּוֹנָה
דְּלוּ עֵינַי לְמָרוֹם אֲדֹנִי עֲשֵׂקָה לִי עֶרְבֹנִי. (ישעיה
לח, יד)

אוֹמֶרֶת יוֹנָה לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: רְבֹנּוּ שָׁל
עוֹלָם יֵהְיוּ מְזוֹנוֹתַי מְרוֹרִים כְּזֵית בִּיָּדְךָ וְאֵל יֵהְיוּ
מִתּוֹקִים כְּדָבָשׁ עַל יְדֵי בָשָׂר וָדָם.

The dove says: **Like the swallow and
the crane I shall chirp, I coo like a**

dove, my eyes raised to the heights. “Hashem, take me! Secure me!”
The dove says to Hashem, **“Master of the world, let my sustenance be as
bitter as an olive from Your hand, rather than sweet as honey from the
hands of flesh and blood.”**

The dove sings of our serene dependency upon our God.

The gentle dove is often the victimized by others and its sole means of survival is to use its wings to fly away. It is a common symbol of the Jewish nation, since we are similarly defenseless in exile, taken advantage of by gentiles. We possess only our wing-like mitzvos which lift us out of harm's reach. It therefore sings of our constant prayer to Hashem to save us. In addition, the dove will never exchange its mate and therefore also symbolizes our loyal connection with Hashem. When the dove brought a leaf from the bitter tasting olive-tree to Noach, it was communicating that it would rather be fed the bitterest meal by Hashem's hand, and not be forced any longer to be sustained with sickly sweet dependency from the hands of man.²

Like the dove, we should not rely on man's hand, even our own, but should rather constantly turn our eyes heavenward in sincere prayer. Our connection to Hashem is our greatest strength by which we have outlived all the mighty nations of antiquity.

¹ *Yona* actually means “pigeon” as is evident from the Mishna that this bird has a bulge by the top of its beak by its nostrils. All other birds drink water simply by opening their beaks, but the dove sucks the water in and it closes its nostrils when it does so, hence the added bulge [פרה ט, ג. כן פירש לי ר' פירש'ר]. Nonetheless, I have chosen to translate *Yona* here as “dove” since this “dove” and “pigeon” are used interchangeably [Wikipedia], and “dove” carries the popular meaning of a peaceful and beautiful bird, more so than the word “pigeon”.

² The Jewish nation is compared to olives since the goodness of the Jewish people is extracted through suffering, similar to the crushing of olives for their oil (Talmud). All Hashem does is for the good and anything that is bitter will end up sweet. Conversely, if the dove is fed unnaturally by man, the very sweetness will prove to be to its detriment, it eventually becomes domesticated and unable to live in the wild. [Based upon the Siach Yitzchak, who writes: “Although the olive is originally bitter, in the end, it is sweet, and although honey is initially sweet, if one eats a large quantity of it, the result is bitterness.”]

THE SONG OF THE EAGLE¹



נֶשֶׁר אָמַר: וְאַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִקְיֹצָה לִפְקֹד כָּל הַגּוֹיִם אֶל תַּחַן כָּל בִּגְדֵי אֶן סֵלָה. (תהלים נט, ו)

The eagle says: “And You Hashem, God, Lord of Legions, God of Israel, awaken to mete out justice upon all of the [enemy] nations, do not favor deceitful traitors, Selah!”

The eagle sings of Hashem’s mighty rule, and His fatherly compassion over His nation.

The eagle is the “King of Birds.” Grand, strong, and fearless, it soars majestically above other birds, and sits on the top of the avian food chain.² Paradoxically, though being cruel to its prey, it displays compassion for its young. When it has to transport them, it carries them on its wings, symbolizing that it prefers that arrows enter it than its eaglets. Similarly, Hashem carried us to freedom from Egypt “on eagles’ wings”, protecting us with His Clouds. When an eagle arrives at its nest, it first hovers above, so as not to startle its young. So too, if Hashem’s nation is “asleep” regarding the mitzvos, He awakens them first gently, then with gradually increasing intensity.³

In its song, it refers to Hashem by His four-letter Name of Mercy as well as “Elokim”, God of Justice, and it bids Him to deal justice on our wicked enemies out of His mercy for His nation.⁴ We, too, should utilize unbending justice to maintain the order of society, yet at the same time exhibit the characteristic Jewish heart and compassion. To correctly combine opposite character traits is a disciplined wisdom. Its beautiful display is the song of the eagle.

¹ The identity of the Nesher is disputed. We have used the popular translation of the Chizkuni, “eagle”, which represents the song better and is an international symbol of kingship. See Sichas Chulin who quotes a second major opinion that it is a species of vulture, which the מסורת העוף specifies as the Griffon Vulture. “Nesher” may be a collective colloquialism for large predatory birds, as is implied in the Machberes HaAruch.

² When any other bird of prey attacks, it will first look around it to ensure that it is not vulnerable to other predators, whereas the eagle attacks without caution or fear. It has been known to attack birds larger than it. [Wikipedia.] It is also kingly in that which it prefers not to mingle with other birds.

³ Pi Eliyahu.

⁴ Based on Kol Rina and others. Shem Mishimon explains “do not favor deceitful traitors” that only the Nesher has all four signs of impurity, which symbolizes that it does not flatter the wicked, but rather shows its true predatory colors. Moreover, its superiority makes flattery needless [RCB].

THE SONG OF THE CRANE¹



עגור אומר: הודו לה'
בכנור בנבל עשור
זמרו לו. (תהלים לג,
ב)

The Crane says:
“Thank Hashem
with a harp, with
a ten-stringed
lyre make music
for Him.”

The crane sings of how a person should express Hashem’s full spectrum of praise – as much as we can comprehend.

The beautiful crane is the tallest and one of the highest flying of all birds, and its calls can be heard kilometers away. It is highly vocal and capable of emitting a wide variety of sounds, sometimes as part of an intricate group dance.² It sings to laud Hashem with every aspect of His praise, like a multiple stringed harp and lyre. The harp is a relatively straightforward instrument to play and symbolizes the masses who praise Him on a basic level, whereas the complex ten-stringed lyre is the tool of individuals who rise above their brethren in their song to the Creator.³

Hashem created the universe for His glory.⁴ When we enjoy His kindnesses, we thank; when we experience His wonders, we bless. Suffering leads to submission; neediness calls for prayer. Victory over our base inclinations is a declaration of Hashem’s kingship; recognition of failure of such arouses repentance. All are forms of Hashem’s praise. Hashem’s Torah fills our lives with a rich variety of meaning. We experience vibrancy and enjoyment in all we do, soaring and singing like the crane.

¹ Rashi (קידושין מד.) and Mahari Kara. Compare Agur with *gru/grua* [crane in Spanish/Italian]. Other Rishonim identify Agur as “swallow”. The swallow is already mentioned in Perek Shira, but it may be certain noticeably sweet singing swallow. Cf. Radak (ירמיה, ח, ז) for an additional translation.

² Wikipedia. Its singing at all ranges of altitude is in line with its message of diversity.

³ It also calls for us to praise Hashem as a group, with a Minyan of ten, like the ten-stringed lyre. Commentary from Beis Elokim.

⁴ He reveals His glory to us to grant us a perception of Him which is the ultimate kindness. It is the essence of the World to Come.

THE SONG OF THE SPARROW¹



צָפוֹר אָמַר: גַּם צָפוֹר מָצָא
בֵּית וּדְרוֹר קֵן לָהּ אִשָּׁר
שָׂתָה אֶפְרָחֶיהָ אֶת
מִזְבְּחוֹתֶיךָ ה' צְבָאוֹת מַלְכִּי
יְאֱלֹהִי. (תהלים פד, ד)
The sparrow says: "Even
the sparrow found a
home and the wild bird
has a nest for herself; she
placed her chicks with
Your altars, Hashem
Lord of Legions, my
King and my God!"

The sparrow sings of our soon-to-come-true dream to praise Hashem in His House and to relate to Him fully through the holy Korbanos.

The sparrow is the most common of all wild birds. In its song, the psalmist expressing his yearning for Hashem's House and bemoans how even tiny, vulnerable sparrows, manage to build nests in the wild, and even fearlessly enter the ruins of the Bais Hamikdash and nest on the locations of the altars. They lay their chicks where we previously offered bird-offerings, and chirp in the same way the Levites would sing. Yet, although Hashem is our "King and God", we ourselves are exiled and unable to come to Hashem's home at all. Every morning and evening, when the sparrows chirp incessantly, from wherever they choose to nest, they are singing of how we, too, are meant to sing to Hashem from our Nest.²

The sparrows remind us to gather in our own Shuls, miniature Batei Mikdash, and sing to the Creator. Throughout our prayers, we express to Hashem our yearning to be returned to our true nest and home, the Bais Hamikdash, and sing the sweet, carefree, and unending song of the sparrow.

¹ Tzipor can refer specifically to the sparrow, or to all song-birds [Ramban], or all birds, as is its general usage. Here, we have followed the translation of the Radak in this verse, also taking into account the singular form of the word "Tzipor". However, its song does apply to a lesser extent to other birds, too. As a matter of interest, "Tzipor" is phonetically similar to sparrow. The Radak suggests that all birds are called "Tzipporim" since the sparrow is the most common species.

² Rashi quotes the Midrash that the bird is a Midrashic metaphor for the Jewish people and the nest is the Bais Hamikdash. Like the air-dwelling bird which lives on Earth, we are a primarily spiritual people who live in an earthly world. ע"ע מדרש שוחר טוב, תהלים פד.

THE SONG OF THE SWALLOW



The swallow says: “[You transformed my mourning into dancing] in order that my soul sing to You and not be silent – Hashem my God, forever I will thank you!”

The swallow sings constantly to the creator, and reminds us to do so, too.

Swallows have slender, streamlined bodies and long pointed wings, making them superb flyers. They have extraordinary endurance, and spend most of their time in the air¹. With its constant, sprightly flight, and sweet chirping, it “sings” and is “not silent from praise”².

Common throughout the world, the swallow reminds us that there is always what to sing about.³ Our mouths will continue to speak as long as we live, and it’s up to us to decide if it will be a sinful weapon or a tool of encouragement⁴ – and a source of song to the Creator.⁵

¹ מסורת העוף. Other sources from Wikipedia.

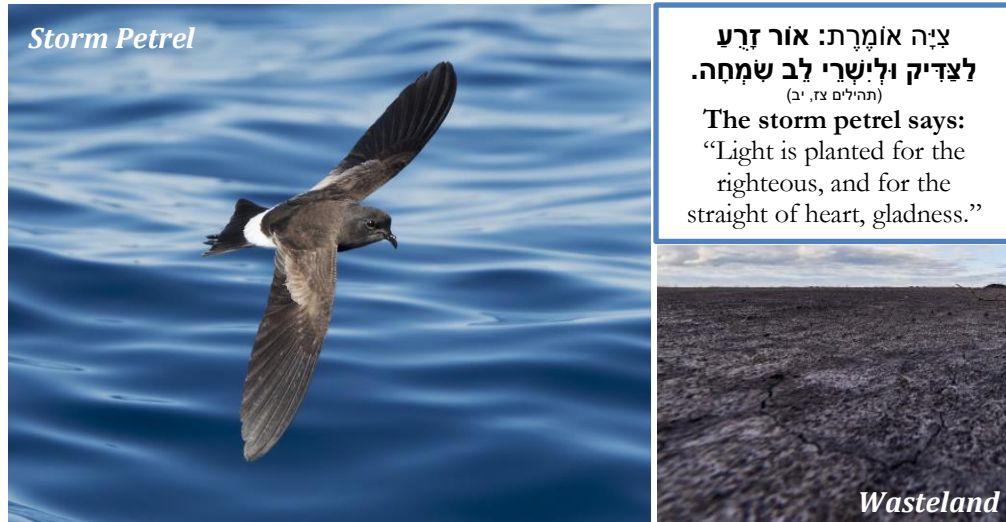
² They are so quick and nimble that they hunt tiny insects in flight.

³ This sentence was drawn partially from "The Song of the Universe" by Rabbi Nosson Sherman, with permission of the copyright holders, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Ltd.

⁴ Yaavetz. He notes that the swallow is one of the birds which are suitable for the gossipmonger’s Tzaraas purification ceremony, hinting that he should rather use his mouth for good purposes.

⁵ Knaf Renanim. The Beis Elokim writes that swallow calls to man: “Sing to Hashem while you live, thank Him while you are able to.”⁵

THE SONG OF THE STORM PETREL¹



The storm petrel sings that Hashem warns the righteous to pray and repent before impending catastrophe.

Storm petrels are the smallest of all seabirds. They spend most of their lives upon the open ocean.² When a storm begins, they seek shelter upon ships³. Their appearance should not be perceived as a herald of calamity, but rather as a God-sent warning to the sailors to ready themselves to weather the storm. More importantly, it calls to the sailors – who are “righteous” “straight of heart” due to their constant dependency on Hashem for survival – to “plant” seeds of prayer which will sprout into great “light” of “glad” salvation.

The storm petrel’s song can be heard on land, too. We should utilize life’s “storms” as opportunities to reach out wholeheartedly to our Father in heaven, and thereby merit much light and happiness.

¹ There is a lack of certainty regarding the identity of the צִיָּה. Our translation and commentary follows the Knaif Renanim, who innovatively decipheres the word to be a construct of "צי" meaning “a ship” – i.e. the ship bird. The usual translation of "ציָה", wasteland, does not fit with standard version of Perek Shira which places it amongst the birds, but rather only with other versions that place it by the desert, in which case it sings how the righteous seem to plant seeds of good deeds that go to waste in this world – like planting in a wasteland – but the seeds will yet sprout in the World to Come. [See Malbim, Radak, and R’ MD Walli.]

² Wikipedia.

³ לשון לימודים.

THE SONG OF THE PEACOCK¹



טְסִית אוֹמֶרֶת: עֲזָרִי
מֵעַם ה' עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם
וְאָרֶץ. (תהלים קכא, ב)

The peacock says:
“My help is from
Hashem, Creator of
the heavens and the
earth.”

The peacock sings that all qualities are gifts from Hashem, and we should turn for help to Him alone, especially in matters of marriage.

The peacock attracts its mate with its breathtaking, multicolored² tail-feather array, unmatched by the rest of the inhabitants of the Earth.³ These bright feathers, patterned with blue-green “eyes”, also function to scare away predators. Its song is that the Creator provides each being with the necessities to survive and to secure its helpmate.⁴

No matter how capable and talented a person is, he should never forget that all of his abilities are tools gifted to him by Hashem, and it is He Who assists us to utilize those tools successfully. A Jew should be as proud to raise his eyes⁵ to his Almighty Father in heaven – as the peacock is to lift its eye-studded feathers.

¹ This translation is doubtful. The Tasis is not recorded in any Torah work. The Yaavetz opines that it is a Tzipor Dror – wild bird. Knaf Renanim quotes Aristotle who describes it as having weak feet, walking little, and almost always flying. Compare this with the Modern Hebrew "טסית", meaning martin, a species of swallow [מסורת העוף]. If so, its feeding in the wild from Hashem's hand, and not from man's, and its constantly flying, is a song about the Jews' help being supernatural, coming from Heaven [Yaavetz and Malbim]. Shiras Yitzchak writes that many translate it as “peacock”, usually called the טווס. In face of doubt, we have chosen the translation “peacock” for our main text, but only for its simplicity. Cf. Perek B'Shir.

² The peacock mentions that its help is from “the heavens and the earth”, because it has all the colors of the heavens and earth upon it [ד"ה שם דף י"ד], מדרש טלפיות, חוקים, ד"ה שם דף י"ד, presumably mostly sky-blue and grass-green totaling 365 shades of color [Tanchuma]. This may have changed after millennia of crossbreeding.

³ It also attracts with song. [Wikipedia]

⁴ The psalm "שיר למעלות", from which "עזרי..." is excerpted, is part of the Tefilla of the Shla for a spouse. However, its application in this commentary is original.

⁵ As described in the preceding verse "אשא עיני אל ההרים". Some versions read that song of the Tasis is actually this preceding verse.

THE SONG OF THE LAUGHING TURTLEDOVE



רָצַפִּי [נוסח אחר אונקי]
אוֹמֵר: נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי
יֹאמֵר אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
(ישעיה מ, א)

The laughing turtledove
says: *Hashem tells the
prophets: "Comfort,
comfort My nation"*
says your God.

The laughing turtledove sings of Hashem's consolation to His beloved exiled people.

Turtledove¹ pairs are firmly bound to each other. If one dies, the other will mourn it forever, and not seek another mate.² Similarly, since the Jewish people were sent away from their mate, Hashem, they mourn inconsolably, refusing to join other religions. Hashem treats us the same way. He says to the prophets, "Comfort, comfort My nation." Comfort the Jewish people that they are still My nation, and I will yet return to them.³ The repeated "comfort" implies that Hashem urges the prophets to describe the great magnitude of the future redemption so that we can already feel solace in that which we will eventually be fully reprieved and restored.⁴

The turtledove's soothing coo reminds us to accept any suffering in our exile as the loving discipline of our Father in Heaven.

Aint

¹ Retzifi has been translated as "laughing turtledove" based on Rabeinu Chananel [שבת פא, *Aruch* [ערכים ייציפי וצלא], and מסורת העוף. Our interpretation of the song applies to all turtledoves, but it is possibly ascribed specifically to the laughing turtledove since its so-called "laughing" coo may more accurately be perceived as low-toned and comforting [See *Perek B'Shir*], or because this species does not migrate, and therefore symbolizes Hashem's remaining with us throughout the winter-like exile.

² רמב"ן ויקרא א, יד.

³ It is possible that the intent of the last words, "says your God" implies as we have explained, that Hashem still considers us to be His nation since we still consider Him to be our God.

⁴ Radak.

THE SONG OF THE STORK



חֲסִידָה אוֹמֶרֶת: דַּבְּרוּ עַל לֵב
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְקִרְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ כִּי מָלְאָה
צָבָאָה כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנָהּ כִּי לָקְחָה
מִיָּד ה' כְּפָלִים בְּכָל חַטָּאתֶיהָ.

(ישעיה מ, ב)

The stork says: “Speak to
Jerusalem’s heart and call out
to her that her measure has
been filled, for her sin has been
pardoned, and she has taken
from Hashem’s hand twofold
for all of her sins.”

The stork sings of our nation’s return from our long winter’s migration.

The stork has the largest wingspan of all birds, reaching up to 3.2 meters, with which it can soar across great distances. The prophet Yirmiyahu castigated his generation for lacking the intuition to follow Hashem’s mitzvos and avoid danger, contrasting them to the stork which migrates to escape harsh winter climates, and then returns without fail at the dawn of spring.¹ Unlike passerine migratory birds who fly solely by instinct, storks memorize their routes, learning from older storks. Yet, that generation strayed from the path of their parents and became lost. The stork comforts us that we, too, will eventually return, in one of three ways. Either when our “full measure of exile has been filled”, or earlier, if we repent: “for her sin has been pardoned”, or, thirdly, Hashem may hasten the redemption by intensifying the exile: “for she has received from Hashem’s hand twofold for all of her sins.”²

The stork also hints to us the way back home. Storks are loyal and kind to each other. Its very name “Chasida” is derived from “Chesed” – kindness.³ If we live with fellowship, Hashem will treat us in the same way, and hasten our return.

¹ גם החסידה בשמים ידעה מועדיה ותור וסיס ועגור שמרו את עת בואנה ועמי לא ידעו את משפט ה' (ירמיה ח, ז) Its migratory route crosses Israel and was therefore a vivid symbol. Other sources are from Wikipedia: Stork.

² Malbim on Yirmiya. See there further.

³ חולין סג. See also מדרש שוחר טוב ק"ד, Sifsei Renanos, Malbim, and Daas Shalom. They write that the Talmud identifies the חסידה as the לבנה, the white stork. White is the Kabbalistic color for kindness. In addition, "חסידה" has the Gematriah of לבן – white. See alternative commentary in אוצר הידיעות.

THE SONG OF THE RAVEN



עֹרֵב אָמַר: מִי יִכֵּין לְעֹרֵב צִידוֹ
כִּי יִלְדֵיו אֵל אֵל יִשְׁוּעִי. (איוב לח,
מא)

The raven says: “Who
prepares for the raven its
sustenance when its young
cry out to God?”

The raven sings of Hashem’s unconditional mercy in providing food for the neglected and helpless.

The raven¹ is infamous for being unmerciful. The raven is starkly black, yet its young are born white. When they are born it suspects them to be the progeny of another father and neglects them until they darken. Until then, Hashem provides the chicks with parasitic fleas for them to feed on.² The merciless raven sings a song of Divine mercy. No being is abandoned by Hashem, even chicks whose feeding ought to be the responsibility of the parents that bore them. Even the smallest and most helpless of creatures are not left without food.

Where human mercy ends, the mercy of the Creator continues. We should strive to emulate Hashem and practice compassionate kindness, even when the pitiful situation is the fault of another’s failed responsibility. We should be particularly careful how we treat the poor, since Hashem hears their plaintive pleas no less than those of raven chicks, and He will take up their cause. When we open our hearts and hands to the poor and their helpless families³, we are giving voice to the song of the raven.

¹ Talmud Kesubos 49b, Rashi, quoted in Kol Rina. It is questionable if all raven species neglect their newborns. See Tosafos ad loc. Ravens eat anything, from garbage to carrion [מסורת העוף]. Crows and ravens are essentially the same bird, though “crow” usually refers to a smaller species [Wikipedia].

² The fleas are attracted to the chicks’ excrement.

³ The simple meaning of the song is that it is referring to Hashem’s sustaining of the raven young. However, it can also be explained slightly differently, that Hashem gives food to the raven itself, even though the raven in turn does not feed its young.

THE SONG OF THE STARLING



זָרְזִיר אָמַר: וְנוֹדַע בְּגוֹיִם זָרָעִם
וְצִאֲצִיָּהֶם בְּתוֹךְ הָעַמִּים כָּל רְאִיָּהֶם
יִכְירוּם כִּי הֵם זָרַע בְּרַךְ ה' (ישעיה, סא, ט)
The starling says: "Their progeny
became known amongst the nations
and their descendants within the
peoples. All those that see them
recognize that they are the progeny
blessed by God."

Starlings sing of the distinctiveness of Hashem's nation that exile cannot blur.

Starlings are very common worldwide and individual flocks can number over one million.¹ They have been known to mingle with the non-Kosher raven². Mingling is an indication of relationship of species, but only if they are alike.³ Starlings have distinguishable appearances and behaviors, and are therefore Kosher.⁴ They sing of Hashem's nation, who were blackened through exile, but have remained distinct. With sideburns, circumcision, *tzitzis*, *tefillin*, *mezuzos*, and a code of conduct that refuses to bend to immoral winds of society, we stand proudly as a nation within nations.⁵

Be business-smart: do not trade an iota of that which lasts forever for something temporal and meaningless. At the same time, we should be wary of the confusing pulls of society.⁶ Maintain constant connection with Hashem through daily prayer and Torah study⁷. Only if we continue our tradition along its millennia-long line can we distinctively remain Hashem's blessed progeny. Keep faith, stride with pride, and live with song.

¹ Starlings are aptly described as having "a blessed progeny", considering that their global population numbers over 300 million. Its blessing is also recognizable since it is a very noisy bird. Even the flapping wings of a flock can be heard hundreds of meters away. Wikipedia.

² See Midrash [תולדות ט"ה, ג'] how a raven landed next to a starling. Interestingly, starlings are skilled mimics [Wikipedia] and can crow like a raven, too. So, too, the Jewish nation may speak the same language as their non-Jewish host nation, but they remain intrinsically an entirely different people. Starlings are able to mimic many sounds. Wikipedia.

³ Talmud [חולין סה, בשיטת אחרים].

⁴ Translations of Kosher animals in the Torah are insufficient grounds to allow their consumption. Some names were confused when we were exiled, and they all require a tradition of their being Kosher.

⁵ Based on Knaf Renanim and Mabit. See also Yaavetz for an additional alternative approach.

⁶ See Kol Rina.

⁷ Knowledge of Torah clarifies our goals in life and reveals the beauty and enjoyment of our religion. Only the ignorant are vulnerable to confusion. Every Jewish ritual is laden with many-layered meaning. Libraries fail to contain all that has been written about our Torah and oceans of profound wisdom never made it to papyrus and paper. We are not afraid of questions. We invite them. Our faultless answers have been waiting since the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

THE SONG OF THE GOOSE



אֶז שְׁבִיבִית אוֹמֶרֶת: הוֹדוּ לֵה'
קְרְאוּ בְּשֵׁמוֹ הוֹדִיעוּ בְּעַמִּים
עֲלִילוּתֵינוּ שִׁירֵנוּ לוֹ זָמְרוּ לוֹ שִׁיחוּ
בְּכֹל נִפְלְאוֹתֵינוּ. (תהלים, קה, א - ב)

The domesticated goose says:
**Thank Hashem, call in His name,
inform the nations of His deeds.
Sing to Him, make music for
Him, speak of all of His wonders.**

The goose sings of how Hashem's praise deserves to be made know to all.

The goose is the most vocal amongst kosher birds and it symbolizes Kosher and pure vocalization: publicizing of Hashem's praise¹ and His Torah². It honks raucously, even for no apparent reason, calling to its human neighbors³ that they too should not be silent.

The entire world sings about its Creator, yet so many do not know Him. We should fill our mouths with Hashem's praise and do our utmost to make Him known, especially in public gatherings of Torah and prayer. Fittingly, the song of the goose is the opening phrase of our morning praises.

¹ It is possible that "אוֹז" is related to the word "אָזְנוֹ", ear, implying that it makes itself heard.

² Based on Zimras Ha'aretz, refer there for more details. See Talmud Brachos ב.נ., that seeing a goose in one's dream is associated with wisdom and with the lecturing role of a Rosh Yeshiva. It says "sing to Him", since the Torah is called a song.

³ This point, that it calls amongst humans, was drawn from "The Song of the Universe" by Rabbi Nosson Sherman with permission of the copyright holders, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Ltd.

THE SONG OF THE WILD GOOSE



אֲנִי הַבֵּר הַמְשֻׁטָּט בַּמִּדְבָּר
בְּשֹׂרָאָה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹסְקִים
בַּתּוֹרָה אוֹמְרֵת "קוֹל קוֹרֵא
בַּמִּדְבָּר פָּנוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְשׁוּעָה
בַּעֲרֵבָה מְסֵלָה לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ" וְעַל
מְצִיאוֹת מְזוֹנוֹתֶיהָ בַּמִּדְבָּר
אוֹמְרֵת "אֲרוּר הַגִּבּוֹר אֲשֶׁר
יִבְטַח בְּאָדָם. בְּרוּךְ הַגִּבּוֹר
אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בְּיְיָ וְהָיָה יי
מְבֹטָחוֹ".

(ירמיה יז, ה-ז)

When the wild goose

flies over the wilderness and sees Yisrael involved in Torah study it says: **A voice calls in the wilderness, "Clear a path for Hashem! Straighten through the plains a pathway to our God."** And on the finding of its sustenance in the wilderness it says: **Cursed is he who trusts upon man. Blessed is he who trusts upon God and God becomes his reliance.**

The wild goose sings of seeking Hashem and blissfully relying upon Him alone.

The wild goose forages in the wilderness and eats from the hand of its Creator, lacking nothing. Remarkably, it is much larger and better off than its domesticated cousins who are fed and fattened by man – and then consumed. It represents the blessing of he who trusts in the Almighty and the foolishness of one who places his lot in the hands of people. The wild goose sings most poignantly when it sees Torah scholars learning in the wilderness where it lives.¹ Nonetheless, its song can heard within the city, too, when Torah scholars “exile” themselves from the comforts and distractions of their homes to the “wilderness” of the Bais Midrash.

It sings of a Heavenly voice that the prophet Yeshaya heard sounding through the desolate Zion, calling to clear the path of Hashem and to lead the Jewish exiles back home. Although the Exile was a devastating punishment, the desolation itself forced us to rely upon Hashem alone. Ultimately, it is this attachment to Him that will bring us back, against all odds.²

¹ This was especially epitomized at the time of the Exodus, when the Jews were involved in Torah study in the wilderness for 40 years, solely dependent on Hashem. Likutei Amarim and Li Lishua.

² Commentary based on Yaavetz and Knaf Renanim, with additions.

THE SONG OF THE CHICKS



פְּרוֹגִיּוֹת אוֹמְרִים: בְּטַחוּ בֵּה' עַד עַד כִּי
בֵּיה' ה' צוֹר עוֹלָמִים. (ישעיה, כו, ד)
The chicks say: **Trust in Hashem
forever, for the awesome God is the
Rock of the worlds.**

Chicks sing of how one should trust in the Almighty regardless of his own weakness.

Baby chickens¹ are extremely fragile. Nonetheless, immediately upon breaking out of their eggs, they strut around independently.² The mother hen cares for them, but as soon as she discerns that they have grown to the extent that they can survive on their own, she pecks them and evicts them. With their characteristic confidence, chicks sing of trust in Hashem, the Rock of the worlds.³ Another aspect of their song is that chicks are sometimes prepared for human consumption prior to their reaching adulthood, which symbolizes one who concludes his life prematurely, and is compensated in the World to Come. Hence, they sing to trust Hashem in "עולמים" – both worlds.⁴

We, who are a lot stronger than newborn chicks, should certainly live with confident trust in Hashem. Our faith in Him is eternal. Whatever injustice we experience in this world will surely be accounted for and rectified in the World to Come.

¹ We have followed the Aruch's first translation of Progis, which he compares to the Arabic Pragis, meaning chick. This word is phonetically similar to the Hebrew אפרוח. [ע' מדרש רבה ריש נשא ש"פ"רג. אפרוח מתחלף עם "פרח"]

² Unlike pigeons and many other birds, which do not leave their nests for some time.

³ Based on Yalkut Shimoni Iyov 925, quoted by Hashira Hazos, see there further.

⁴ מבריותיו אחכם, adding that their song mentions "ביה", that Hashem created the worlds with the two letters "י" and "ה". Alternatively, there is a resemblance to trust in the next world by that which it emerges alive from a grave-like egg.

THE SONG OF THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE¹



רחמה אומרת: אֲשַׁרְקָה לָהֶם וְאֶקְבָּצֵם כִּי פְדִיתִים

The Egyptian vulture says: [Says Hashem:] **I will whistle to them and gather them, for I will redeem them and they will have become as numerous [in exile] as they used to be [in Egypt].**

The Egyptian vulture sings of Hashem's mercy upon His nation and His eventual ingathering of their exiles.

The Egyptian vulture has characteristic compassion upon its young. It lays its eggs amongst high rocks, out of reach of predators, and it cares for its fledglings long after they hatch. It is called “Rachama” because of this mercy [רחמים], and it therefore signifies similar Heavenly mercy upon us. We have a tradition that when it calls in a certain way, it is a herald of coming rains², and in another way, it can even herald the coming of the Mashiach. It therefore sings of Hashem calling the Jewish exiles to ingather.

The Egyptian vulture teaches that our meagre acts of mercy below, even towards our own children, can arouse Heavenly mercies of Godly proportion.³ Sympathy is an important Mitzvah of its own. The sheer power of an actual act of charity is inconceivable. If we hear the calls of others, Hashem will hear our call, too, and the Egyptian vulture will sound its final herald.

¹ Our translation follows R' Saadyah Gaon. Sources about its compassion from מסורת העוף, who adds that it is also empathic to its mate. Many have questioned that this bird does not call “Shrak-rak” as is implied from the Gemara, [Chulin 63a] and certainly from Rashi. However, the Aruch explains that the Rachama usually does not call out, and that is actually why, when it does so, it is an omen. Contrarily, the Chizkuni translates: “Magpie”, which makes a chattering call that sounds like “chac-chac”. It is highly intelligent, the only self-cognizant bird, and it follows that it is compassionate. It is known to cut food to the right size for the beaks of its fledglings, care for them, and protect them. [Wikipedia]

² When it sits on something and calls, it heralds rain. When it calls on the ground [possibly as an expression of mourning], it heralds the Mashiach.

³ זמרת השמים והארץ interprets “ורבו כמו רבו” of this song to mean that Divine mercies will increase in proportion to our merciful acts of charity.

THE SONG OF THE EGYPTIAN TREE LOCUST



צִפּוֹרֶת כְּרָמִים אוֹמְרֹת:
אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל הַהָרִים
מֵאֵין יָבֹא עֲזָרִי. (תהילים קכא)

The Egyptian tree locust
says:

**I shall raise my eyes to
the mountains; from
where will my help
come?**

The Egyptian tree locust sings that Hashem created remedies for every situation; we just have to look for them.

The Egyptian tree locust¹ is a Kosher species which was sought for its medicinal qualities and for its usage as an intellectual stimulant.² It sings the hope of those that seek it, “From where will my help come?” Ultimately, a Jew realizes that his help is from the One and Only God, as the subsequent verse indeed continues, “My help is from Hashem”. However, when there is a practical solution, one cannot rely on prayer alone.³

When we rely wholly upon Hashem, but at the same time, utilize the tools He provides, we bring Hashem’s blessing into our world, and give expression to the song of the Egyptian tree locust.

¹ (חולין תזיפּוֹרֶת *Hakeramim* literally means “bird of the vineyards”, but it is clear from the Talmud (סו.ה.) that it is a species of *Arbeh*-locust found particularly on young date palms. Cf. *Aruch on the Shas, Pardes*. The translation “Egyptian Tree Locust”, or “גובי מצרי”, is the deduction of the zoologist Aharoni, but it is not known for certain. It is the largest of eastern locusts. It flies relatively high, resembling a bird somewhat, and eats from fruit-trees – unlike most other locusts which tend to fly low and eat grains and bushes. Cf. <http://www.daf-yomi.com/DYItemDetails.aspx?itemId=50334>

² תלמוד בבלי שבת צ: [ט, ז], Compare to Talmud Yerushalmi, with their respective commentaries. Yerushalmi also writes that it is a remedy for a woman ailing from סְטִיפָה [A dermatological condition (פגמ) or an excessive flow of blood (ע"פ ערוך)].

³ ע"פ מדרש ריש ויצא. מצאתי חבר בסידור תורת חכם עמ' תקע. שוב ראיתי שכבר היה דומה לזה במב"ט. והייק מ"עם ה". Cf. Perek B'Shir, who explains that it is the locust itself which looks for a source of help from its hunters. A third possible interpretation may be that it makes a shrill mating call for its "help"-mate. However, this seems unlikely, since almost all locusts make such calls.

THE SONG OF THE CHASIL LOCUSTS¹



חֲסִיל אֹמֵר: ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֶתָּה, אֲרוֹמְמֶךָ,
אוֹדָה שְׁמֶךָ, כִּי עָשִׂיתָ פֶּלֶא, עֲצוֹת
מִרְחוֹק אֶמְוֶנָה אִמֵּן. (ישעיה כה, א)
The Chasil-locust says: Hashem,
You are my God, I will exalt and
thank You for You have done
wonders; counsels from long
ago were affirmed faithfully.

The Chasil-locust sings how Hashem will faithfully fulfil His fantastic prophecies of His nation's salvation down to the very last detail.

A large swarm of locusts can consist of billions of locusts spread out over an area of thousands of square kilometers.² The Chasil species is the most damaging of all locusts, destroying crops entirely.³ They sing how Hashem should be exalted beyond natural limits and thanked for fulfilling all His assurances without fail. He did so when he saved us from the Egyptians through the Chasil-locusts⁴, and He will likewise redeem us in the future.⁵ The Talmud⁶ teaches that because of the sin of theft, locusts proliferate and crops are destroyed. Theft in itself is a relatively small crime, but if committed repeatedly within a whole society, it corrupts the system entirely. It is therefore fitting that theft is punished by insects which are individually insignificant, but which altogether devastate a country.⁷

Thankfully, locust plagues are a rarity, yet the locusts' very existence is a constant song of Hashem's exalted justice. In the same way that unnoticed locusts can proliferate into billions at a designated time, so too can Hashem's salvation will one day quickly fill a horizon previously empty of hope.

¹ Although this is the song of the Chasil-locust in particular, it applies to a lesser extent to all locusts. See אוצר לשון המקרא, that the Chasil is not a species, but rather the wingless nymph phase, when they eat more. If so, this would explain why Hashem had to bring them into Egypt with a wind.

² Wikipedia.

³ Hence its name "Chasil", meaning to annihilate [Talmud Yerushalmi פ"ג, ה"ו].

⁴ Rashi. ע"ע רא"ם.

⁵ Based on Li Lishuah and Perek B'shir. The verse of this song is an excerpt from the prophecy of the downfall of our conqueror, Babylon, as promised to Avraham in the Covenant Between the Parts, "מרחוק" – long ago. In this song, "מרחוק" might also refer to the locusts flying in "from afar".

⁶ שבת לב:

⁷ Furthermore, locusts do not have a king to guide them. They attack like a devastating group of individual thieves. This comparison is sourced in Mishlei (ל, כז).

THE SONG OF THE SPIDER



By Stephen C. Dickson

שְׁמִמִּית אֶמְרָת: הַלְלוּהוּ
בְּצִלְצְלֵי שְׁמַע הַלְלוּהוּ
בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה. (תהילים קנ)

The spider says: **Extol Him**
with resonances of the
cymbals; extol Him with
resonances of the trumpet!

The spider sings how Hashem's praise is obvious and comes without Him seeking it.

King Shlomo marvelled at how the spider is so small, yet great in wisdom. With its hands it weaves a web, and then sits in its centre like a king in his palace.¹ It does not have to seek its prey; it waits royally for it to come. It sings that Hashem, the King of the Universe, should likewise be praised with voluminous cymbals and trumpets. Hashem should not have to seek a following. Let the whole world simply open their ears to His praise and come to Him.²

The purpose of creation is that Hashem's name and glory be revealed in His world. Even within our daily routine, our deeds themselves should exemplify the pleasantness of Hashem's ways and sanctify His name, especially when we are in the eye of the public. As "a light unto the nations", we have but to perfect our own conduct, and then to wait patiently for all to follow our lead.

¹ כד, משלי, based on Malbim and Likutei Maamarim.

² Indeed the subsequent verse of Tehilim is the conclusive one: כל הנשמה תהלל י-ה הללוי-ה. Let all the souls praise Hashem, Halleluka! There is an alternative, deeper approach to the spider's song. The spider represents the fourth exile: Edom. [ילק"ש משלי תתקס"ד, הובא ברש"י ובהשירה הזאת] Its orb-web is a weaver's masterpiece, yet its product is never worn. [ע' אלפא ביתא דבן סירא] It represents the flimsy home built and invested in by the wicked in this world. [ע' אלפי ישראל] In the verse of its song, King David exclaims that even if one praises Hashem with all kinds of musical instruments, they amount to nothing, unless one praises with his soul, and therefore, "Let all souls praise Hashem". [זוהר חדש] In other words, the Edom-like spider sings that all human accomplishments are meaningless compared to the praises of the soul. [ע"ע גנוי יוסף, תולדות]

THE SONG OF THE FLY



זבוב אומר, בְּשִׁעָה נִשְׁאֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹסְקִים בַּתּוֹרָה: "קוֹל אִמֵּר קָרָא
וְאָמַר מָה אֶקְרָא כָּל הַפֶּשֶׁר תִּצִּיר וְכָל תַּסְדּוֹ כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה." (ישעיה מ, ו)
"יִבָּשׁ תִּצִּיר נֶבֶל צִיץ וְדָבָר אֶלְקִינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם." (שם, ח) בּוֹרָא נִיב
שְׁפָתַיִם שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם לְרַחֵק וְלִקְרוֹב אָמַר ה' וַיִּרְפָּאֵתִיו. (שם נז, יט)

The fly says, at a time when Yisrael are not involved in Torah study:
A voice says "Call!" and I said, "What shall I call?" [The voice responded to call:] "All of
flesh is like grass and all of its kindness like the sprouts of the field. The grass will have
dried up and the sprout will have withered, but the word of our God will stand forever."
"I create speech of lips which brings peace unto the far and the near," says Hashem,
"and I have healed him."

The fly sings that Hashem's Torah is the only repellent against the evil inclination.

The ever-buzzing, pestering, and relentless¹ fly symbolizes the Yetzer Hara². It sits by the gates of the heart and advises it that repulsive sins are mitzvos, in the same way a fly is attracted to rotten matter. Its foolish and worthless desires can mislead even the wise, in the same way that a few insignificant flies can fall in and ruin the finest, expensive perfumed oils.³ Hashem's sole prescribed antidote for the Yetzer Hara is Torah study, which clearly teaches right from wrong and purifies the mind. If it is abandoned, the fly returns. As the fly hops pointlessly from surface to surface, it sings that if one listens to the similarly pointless Yetzer Hara, his accomplishments will be as short-lasting as a "withering sprout". It concludes that the "word of Hashem" which promises redemption will only materialize when we are engaged in the study of His Torah, whose "speech brings healing".⁴

Flies intrude everywhere, not letting us forget their song. Even good deeds are often fueled by selfish intentions, and the only remedy is the study of the truth: Torah. One who does not know the rules of the game cannot hope to win it. We need to open windows for the Torah to enlighten our every day and guide our steps.

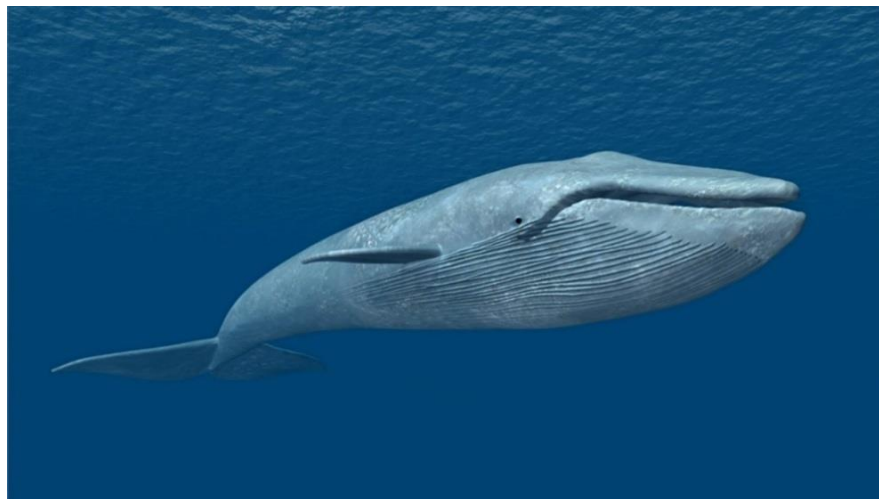
¹ ברכות יצחק בשם ח"ח עה"ת עמ' מו וכתב סופר עה"ת עניני תשובה, R' C.B. added that the fly is annoying, but harmless if ignored, like the Yetzer Hara.

² Talmud Brachos סא. Our commentary is based partially on Nefesh HaChaim, Shir HaChaim, and others.

³ Koheles א, י, according to Rashi. Cf. Targum ad loc. and Tikunei Zohar (ל). At times, the Yetzer Hara leads to the left side, the secondary, base direction, to choose sin foolishly. At other times, it directs rightward, the primary direction of the wise heart, tricking one to think that evil is intellectually correct. Based on above sources.

⁴ Based on Yerushalmi Brachos [ה, ה] which writes that when R' Chanina Ben Dosa's prayers were fluent on his lips, they brought healing, sourced in this verse. So, too, when Torah is fluent on a person's lips, it heals him physically and spiritually. Similarly, one can suggest that the "Word of Hashem" is also a reference to His words of Torah. Note how the fly's song is a continuation and a flip-side of that of the wild goose.

THE SONG OF THE SEA GIANTS¹



תַּנִּינִים אֹמְרִים: הִלְלוּ אֶת ה' מִן הָאָרֶץ תַּנִּינִים וְכָל תְּהוֹמוֹת.
(תהילים קכג)

The sea giants say: **Praise Hashem from the earth, sea giants and all of the depths.**

The sea giants sing of Hashem's greatness in their creation and ongoing nourishment.

If whale-sized creatures lived on land, they would destroy it in their hunger, and then die out themselves with nothing to eat. Nevertheless, Hashem was able to reveal His greatness in their creation by placing them in humungous oceans filled with fish which keep on replenishing their numbers. As great as they are, sea-giants are actually more dependent upon the hand of the Creator for survival than any other bring, since they require the most food. The largest whales feed on innumerable microscopic beings every single day. Since whales are the largest beings on earth, they are the first on King David's list of the earth's praises.² They sing that no creature is too large for the Creator to create and to feed.

Their song should inspire us to live with an appreciation of Hashem's greatness and to praise Him for His wondrous kindnesses.

¹ The term "Tanin" refers to great aquatic beings and can also mean "snake".

² Midrash. Whales are particularly noticeable since they have to rise regularly to breathe.

THE SONG OF THE LEVIATHAN¹



לֵוִיָּתָן אוֹמֵר: הוֹדוּ לֵה' כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדּוֹ. (תהילים קלו, א)
The Leviathan says: **Thank Hashem for He is good, for His kindness is forever.**

The Leviathan sings of Hashem's perfect goodness, every moment of history.

The Sages teach that in the future, the righteous will feast on the flesh of the gigantic Leviathan fish and sit under the shade of its skin.² In simple terms, this mystical concept refers to endless spiritual pleasure – the endproduct of this world. Even now, the Leviathan sings of this ideal kindness by that which it feeds by merely opening its mouth and fish swim in on their own accord.³

We are humans with limited mental capacities. We cannot expect to fathom how all of Hashem's deeds are good in of themselves, and are part of an infinitely complex plan to prepare us for perfect, eternal pleasure. For the little we do understand, we thank and praise, but the song of Leviathan will only be fully expressed at the end of the world. After we feast upon it, we will finally be able to say with utter comprehension: **"Thank Hashem for He is good, for His kindness is forever."**

¹ The Leviathan is an unknown fish. The presented picture was provided for illustrative purposes only.

² בבא בתרא עה.

³ Talmud Bava Basra 74: Zimras Haaretz. Assumedly, it grows even in old age, as the Talmud records that all fish do, signifying its increasing song throughout history.

THE SONG OF THE FISH



דגים אומרים: קול ה' על
המים אל הכבוד הרעים ה'
על מים רבים.
(תהילים כט: ג)

The fish say: **The voice of Hashem was upon the waters, the God of glory rumbled – Hashem – upon many waters.**

The fish sing of Hashem's glory within the ocean and of the splendor of His oceanlike Torah.

Three and a half trillion fish fill the vast oceans¹ in a kaleidoscope of colors, shapes, and sizes, displayed in all their beauty through the transparent waters. They sing how Hashem's voice blessed them to be fruitful and multiply, and to express His glory within the oceanic kingdom and His kindness of feeding the myriads of creatures within it.² On a deeper level, their song is excerpted from a description of the giving of the Torah with thunder and rains of "great waters", symbolizing the water-like nature of the Torah³. The fish sing of this voice since they are like Torah scholars who swim within the Torah and whose blissful lifestyle is inconceivable to those on land.⁴

Fish make us aware of the greatness and beauty of Hashem's world and the comparative insignificance of petty events and trivial losses in mundane life. We should focus our energies on eternal spiritual pursuits, such as Torah study and satiate our souls with its wisdom every day. The more Torah we know, the more we can appreciate the beauty of the Creator's voice singing upon the waters.

¹ Wikipedia.

² Based partially on Malbim. והארץ זמרת השמים quotes an interesting observation of many sailors that the day before a sea-storm, large fish swim around ships, jumping, rising, and skipping in a seemingly joyous fashion, singing of Hashem's might upon the waters.

³ תהלים סח, ט ומכילתא דרשב"י, י"ט, ט"ז. The Torah is compared to water in numerous ways. Amongst them: it is vast, life-giving [as in R' Akiva's famous "fish on land" parable], and purifying [See מדרש ש"ה"ש א ד"ה ג ד"א כי].

⁴ Based on R' Hirsch's interpretation of "וידגו לרוב" [בראשית, מח, טז]. The basis of the deeper level of commentary is from "מבריותיו אהכם" and "נשמת שיר". They add the fish swim in schools, in the way that Torah is learned as a group, and fish constantly open their mouths, the way one should constantly open his mouth in Torah study.

THE SONG OF THE FROG



צְפָרֶדֶעַ אֹמֶרֶת: בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד
מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

The frog says: **Blessed be the name
of His glorious kingdom forever
and ever.**

The frog sings of Hashem's eternal, glorious kingship over all.

Dovid Hamelech once walked along the riverbank and exclaimed, "Master of the Universe, is there anyone in the world who thanks and praises his Master as much as I do?" He encountered a frog. It said to him, "Don't be haughty, for I exceed you. I gave up my life for the will of my Master when I jumped into the ovens of Egypt to putrify the Egyptians' bread. Furthermore, I praise Him day and night, without silence."¹ When the frog leapt into the Egyptian ovens, it declared that even its very life was an insufficient expression of Hashem's eternal praise.² With its constant croaking, the frog sings that Hashem's name should be blessed forever,³ since there is no end to His praise.⁴

We strive to do Hashem's will throughout our lives. Every moment is another note in the song of His kingship. Although we may not be challenged to give up our lives, sometimes the right choice is against our instincts, involving great discomfort or financial loss, and only a frog-leap of faith can get us through. There are times of confusion. Then, like a ship which sails through dense fog that relies blindly on its navigational calculations, we have try do what appears best, and leave the rest to Hashem. A Jew may aim with deliberation, but he leaps with confident faith. And wherever he lands, he lives with song.⁵

¹ Zohar, Pinchas 232b. Dovid then concluded "Hashem, my heart was not haughty..." Compare with similar record in introduction to Perek Shira and our commentary there.

² Commentary based partially on Malbim and בְּשֵׁמִי וּלְכַבּוֹדִי בְּרֵאשִׁיתוֹ. Also the frog's regular jumping, which is necessary for its survival, symbolizes how sometimes logical steps are not all clear and a person has to leap.

³ R' Chaim Kanievsky. We have translated "ברוך שם" to be a blessing, based on Targum Yonasan. Some translate "ברוך" invariably to mean a praise of Hashem being the source of all blessing. In this song, the general meaning is the same, regardless.

⁴ בְּשֵׁמִי וּלְכַבּוֹדִי בְּרֵאשִׁיתוֹ.

⁵ Even after a decision, confusion may continue, but this is part of the trial. Trials which truly challenge one's nature are the ones that accord him the greatest reward and spiritual promotion.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAMMALS

THE SONG OF SHEEP AND GOATS



בְּהֵמָה דָּקָה טְהוֹרָה אוֹמֶרֶת:
מִי כְמוֹכָה בְּאֵלֶם ה' מִי
כְּמוֹכָה נֶאֱדָר בְּקִדְשׁ נִזְרָא
תְּהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פֶלֶא.
(שְׁמוֹת טו, יא)

The small Kosher
domestic animals say:
**Who is like You among
the mighty, Hashem,
who is like You
immense in holiness,
too awesome for
praise, Who does
wonder.**



Sheep and goats sing of the awesome might of the Shepherd of the Jewish flock.

Sheep and goats are small and submissive. They are defenseless as their masters make use of their milk and fleece, or even slaughter them for their meat and hides. They sing the song of the “Hashem’s flock”, the Jewish people, who are helpless amongst the seventy wolf-like nations, relying on their incomparably mighty Shepherd. The word "אֵלֶם", literally meaning “the mighty”, also means “the mute”, since the greatest sign of might is silence in the face of enemies. When Hashem allowed the nations to conquer us and even sacrilegiously destroy His holy abode, the Bais Hamikdash, this silence was an expression of His confidence that nobody can truly harm Him or entirely destroy the eternal nation under His custody.¹ He watches carefully, and when He sees the time has come for Him to gather His scattered flock at the day’s end, none will stop Him.

Mightier than any wolf is a sheep – when guarded by its Shepherd. We should humbly realize that we are as vulnerable as sheep and that there is little we can do to control our lives, except to keep near the Shepherd. We should feel tranquil in Hashem’s hand and focus our energies on accomplishing our life goals. Our calmness exudes a song of unrivaled power.²

¹ Based on Yaavetz and Kol Rina.

² We have focused on the sheep, which are more placid than goats. Sometimes, though, our way of life is endangered and we must be as brazen as goats and strong as rams to stand our stead.

THE SONG OF THE COW



בְּהֵמָה גְּסָה טְהוֹרָה אֹמְרָת: הֲרִנִּינוּ לֵאלֹהִים עֹזֵנֵנוּ
הֲרִיעוּ לֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב. (תהילים פא, ב)

The large Kosher domestic animals say: **Sing to the God of our might! Trumpet to the God of Yaakov!**

Cows sing about feasting over Hashem's kingship.

A cow is a large and powerful animal which docily conforms to the will of its master, and it therefore sings of Hashem's kingship. Its song is the opening phrase of the Levites song on Rosh Hashana, which calls on us to rejoice over Hashem's kingship by feasting on meat¹, even though our lives depend on how He judges on this day, since we are content with whatever our Merciful God decides.² Similarly, all festivals are celebrations of Hashem's kingship and expressions of the cow's song.

Hashem's nation need not and should not worry. Our trust in the God of our Might is in itself a great protective merit, and it conveys a Divine song worth a cow giving its life for.

¹ Although mutton is equally fitting for a festival, beef is usually the primary choice, presumably since its great size makes its slaughtering more economical.

² Based on Malbim, who explains that this verse teaches the same message as that of Nechemiah and Ezra [נחמיה ה, ט] on the first Rosh Hashana after the Babylonian exile, when the people were mournful and worried about their taking of foreign wives in the Babylonian exile, and unable to rejoice. Nechemiah and Ezra told them to feast and not to worry, since their joyous trust upon Hashem is their foremost strength on the Day of Judgment.

THE SONG OF THE PIG



בְּהֵמָה דַּקָּה טָמְאָה אֹמְרָת: הִיטִיבָה ה' לטוֹבִים וְלִישָׁרִים בְּלִבּוֹתָם. (תהילים קכה, ד)
The small non-Kosher domestic animals say: **Bestow good, Hashem, to the goodly, and to the upright in their hearts.**

The pig sings that Hashem sees to the heart.

The pig has split hooves which it proudly stretches out when it lies down, feigning purity. However, in the inside, it does not patiently chew its cud, the second requisite of a Kosher animal. On the contrary, it is notoriously gluttonous and altogether repulsive.¹ The pig stands as a stark model of those that are outwardly good as a façade to hide their inner lust and gluttony. Its existence sings of Hashem's rightful bestowal of kindness only to those who truly deserve it: those that are good in deed and upright at heart.

The pig reminds us that Hashem sees into the heart. He abhors two-facedness and eagerly welcomes admittance of guilt and repentance.

¹ Its repulsive nature expresses itself externally, as well. Of the ten measures of Tzaraas [a type of leprosy] in the world, nine went to the pigs. The word "חזיר" means to turn around. This refers to that which it must turn its entire body to look behind it, since its neck is short [פסיקתא זוט' שמיני], symbolizing that which its head – generally the elevated part of any organism – is one and the same as its lowly body.

THE SONG OF THE LARGE NON-KOSHER LIVESTOCK



בהמה גסה טמאה אומרת: יגיע כפִּיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ.
(תהילים קכח, ב)

The large non-Kosher domestic animals [including horses, donkeys and camels] say: **The labor of your palms you shall eat, you are praiseworthy and it is good for you.**

Large non-Kosher livestock sing of the beautiful system of Hashem's world, that hard workers eat the fruits of their labor.

Large non-Kosher livestock are kept solely for the benefit of their labor. They work hard and without complaint, and their efforts pay off at the end of the day when they calmly go to their sheds where fodder waits in their troughs.¹ They sing that humble laborers who do not seek wealth by easy illicit means are “praiseworthy” in their contentment in this world, and “it is good” for them when their painstaking honesty is rewarded in the World to Come.²

By maintaining healthy and holy hard work habits, in addition to being doubly blessed, we are joining in this song of the Creator's righteous fairness.

¹ Knaf Renanim.

² ילקוט שמעוני

THE SONG OF THE CAMEL



גמל אומר: ה' ממרום
ישאג וממעון קדשו יתן
קולו שאג ישאג על נוהו.
(ירמיה כה, ל)

The camel says: Hashem
from on high roars and
from His holy dwelling
he emits His voice,
He roars and shouts
about His abode.

The camel sings of the deep relationship between Hashem and His people, even they are exiled far away.

The camel is incredibly resilient to the intense heat of the desert and can go for nine days without water. It does not need refined food and can eat even thorns.

¹ The sages teach that the camel symbolizes the Babylonian exile, which is describe as a "גמול" – a payment of punishment – which has the same word-root as "גמל" – camel.² Then, the Jewish nation was exiled from Hashem's chosen land to the spiritual desert of Babylon, with only a hump-ful of water-like Torah: the few hundred master Torah scholars who joined them in exile. To this day, the camel sings of Hashem's roars of anguish over His banished children, since we have not yet fully recovered from that exile.³

Since the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, it has been harder to relate to Hashem, but the rules of our relationship remain the same. Hashem treats small mitzvos in our generation like great feats of faith in bygone days.⁴ Even sins are treated with consideration with the times that we live in. We should not forget that He loves us still beyond our comprehension and yearns mightily for our return. In the meantime, even if the spiritual music is on low volume, we must sing with it.

¹ Based on Daas Shalom and Tzaltzal Knafaim.

² ויקרא רבא יג, ה.

³ Its roar is mentioned three times in this Pasuk to represent the three times in the night that Hashem roars. Kol Rina based on Talmud Brachos. See Knaf Renanim for more on the camel's symbolism regarding our relationship with Hashem during exile.

⁴ Arizal.

THE SONG OF THE HORSE



סו אומר: הנה כעיני עבדים אל יד אדוניהם כעיני שפחה אל יד גברתה כן
עינינו אל ה' אלהינו עד שיחננו. (תהילים קכג, ב)

The horse says: **Behold, like the eyes of slaves who look to the hands of their masters, like the eyes of the maidservant who looks to the hand of her mistress, so too are our eyes to Hashem our God, until He is gracious to us.**

The horse sings of the untiring and undemanding attitude with which we ought to serve Hashem.

Mighty, formidable, and tireless, a horse is a loyal servant to its master. It sleeps while standing, in brief naps which total to three hours a day, yet this paltry amount is sufficient for it to retain its unequalled vitality.¹ Even after its superhuman labor, it looks only hopefully towards the hand of its master to feed him. With its eyes, which incidentally are larger than those of any other mammal on land,² it sings of the attitude man ought to have to his Benefactor, Hashem.

We should strive to be like our forefathers who were described as “running like horses” to do the will of Hashem³, yet they made no demands on their Master, Whom they served tirelessly.⁴ If we would gallop like the horse, willingly, with a lust to serve, we would long ago have reached our destination and destiny.

¹ Wikipedia. The Sages noted six characteristics which are indicative of the horse's fiery nature: 1) It eats a lot, 2) it excretes little, 3) it loves licentiousness 4) it loves battle, 5) it is haughty, and 6) it disdains sleep. Despite its size and power, it allows itself to be led even by a child. ע"ע אוצר הידיעות.

² Wikipedia. The very eyes which fight sleep to serve its master look humbly to be fed.

³ גמרא סנהדרין. They did so even though they went through many ordeals in which they appeared to have been mistreated by their Master. Nevertheless, they comprehended Hashem's perfect benevolence and maintained their faith and wholehearted allegiance to their faultless God. They made no demands on their Master they served tirelessly. They prayed only for compassion. It was because of their unquestioning devotion that He loved them so.

⁴ Perek B'shir.

THE SONG OF THE MULE



פָּרַד אֹמֵר: יוֹדוּךְ
ה' כָּל מַלְכֵי אֶרֶץ כִּי
שָׁמְעוּ אִמְרֵי פִיךָ.
(תהילים קלח, ד)

The mule says: All
kings of the land
will acknowledge
You, Hashem, for
they heard the
sayings of Your
mouth.

The mule sings of the justness of all Hashem's mitzvos.

A mule is the byproduct of a horse and a donkey. Hashem forbids such unnatural mixtures.¹ The Midrash² teaches that when non-Jewish kings heard that Hashem commanded us to respect parents like Himself, they acknowledged the utter correctness of all Hashem's mitzvos, unlike the selfish decrees of human kings which are often unreasonable.³ The mule is a stark example of this, since its breeder has not only perverted the Creator's chosen design of His creatures, he has also created a clearly defective product, since mules are barren.⁴ The mule is therefore a living song of the kings' acknowledgment.⁵

The Torah is the indispensable manual for life. It has stood the test of time throughout ever-changing world history, despite relentless assault from opposing theologies, and has emerged unchanged. At times, new philosophies confuse the masses to believe that another lifestyle is superior. This may be so in one or two aspects – like the mule. But it eventually falls on the roadside of history and does not bear fruits of true success – like the mule. By living according to the Torah in its purest form, our every confident step resonates to the song of the mule.

¹ This prohibition applies even to non-Jews according to one opinion in Sanhedrin.

² במדבר רבה ח, ד.

³ The correctness is apparent from the Mitzvah to honor parents. Hashem wishes us to honor our human creators – parents – similar to the way we are to honor the ultimate Creator.

⁴ They are also notoriously harmful creatures. See Perek B'Shir (Bnei Brak). Our commentary is based mostly on it and on צלצל כנפים.

⁵ This acknowledgment is of particular significance to royal families of mountainous regions such as Israel who favored riding on mules to benefit from their combined speed and sturdiness. [ע' מלכים א, א, לג, תוספתא כלאים ה, ד, וירושלמי ח, ב]

THE SONG OF THE DONKEY



חמור אומר: לך ה' הגדלה והגבורה והתפארת והנצח וההוד כי כל בשמים ובארץ
לך ה' הממלכה והמתנשא לכל לראש. (דברי הימים א' כט, יא)

The donkey says: Yours Hashem is the greatness, the might... for in all of the heavens
and the earth to You Hashem is the kingship and the raising of all heads.

The donkey sings of the greatness of subservience to the will of Hashem.

The donkey is the classical beast of burden. The Zohar remarks that it “is not arrogant and it does not kick out against its master.”¹ It willingly carries encumbering loads on its back and sings of the virtue of subjugation to the Master of the world.²

No matter what load Hashem places on our backs, we should have faith that He knows how much we can carry. Even if we do not understand why He wants us to undergo certain challenges, we must carry on with loyal obedience. Hashem understands more than we do.³ We should learn from the donkey that the only true greatness one can reach is to carry the load of its master.⁴ It is lowly and shameful to stoop before another human being, but when one buckles to the will of the Master of the world, he emits not a whimper, but a song of majesty. Not for naught is it said that the Mashiach will ride on a donkey.

¹ It is also not a picky about the cleanliness of its food (שבת קמא.) or the comfortableness of its sleeping quarters (זוהר. מקורות מאוצר הידיעות).

² Knesses Yaakov.

³ In this respect, it is virtuous to emulate the donkey, called “the stupid amongst domestic animals” [תנחומא].

⁴ It sings “To You Hashem is the greatness...” since the greater the master, the greater the donkey carrying his load.

THE SONG OF THE OX



שׁוֹר אָמַר: אֲנִי יֹשִׁיר מִשָּׁה וּבְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לֵה'
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר אֲשִׁירָה לֵה' כִּי גָאָה
גָּאָה סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם. (שמות טו,
(א)

The ox says: **Then Moshe and the Children of Israel chose to sing to Hashem this song, and they said responsively, "I will sing to Hashem for He**

[has shown Himself to be] loftier than the lofty. Horse and rider were cast into the sea."

The ox sings of Hashem superiority over all, and of the fallacy of His creatures' haughtiness.

The ox is a mighty beast which is dangerous even to humans¹, yet it subjugates itself to the master who feeds it.² The Talmud³ notes that there are four lofty ones: the lion amongst the wild animals, the ox amongst the domestic animals, the eagle⁴ among the birds, and man. Hashem showed Himself to be "loftier than the lofty" when the Egyptian superpower was drowned as one in the sea.⁵ Out of the four lofty ones, only the ox sings constantly of Hashem's superiority through its submissive nature. Most poignantly, Yosef was compared to an ox when he restrained himself from committing adultery⁶, and it was only when the sea saw his coffin that it split.⁷

Man is the greatest of the four lofty ones. Greatness however must not translate into haughtiness. We should humbly recognize the true source of all we have, and the more we are granted, the greater our obligation to subjugate ourselves to Hashem. By doing so, we merit to echo one of the greatest songs in history.

¹ The Talmud says to distance oneself from an ox approximately 25 meters, and if it is known to gore, one should stay out of eyesight.

² "The ox knows the trough of its master".

³ חגיגה יג

⁴ Alternatively, Griffon Vulture.

⁵ Quoted in Pi Eliyahu.

⁶ His being called "ox" because of his submission to Hashem is a suggestion.

⁷ Kol Rina. According to one opinion, the ox also sang "אֲנִי יֹשִׁיר" when the Philistines returned the Aron on oxen, symbolizing the Philistines defeat [Cf. Maharsha]. This is derived from the word "וישרנה", which refers both to that which they moved in a straight line, and to that which they sang. The קובץ חידושים writes that word "שׁוֹר" is a derivative of "שׁוֹרָה", since it makes straight furrows. With every obedient, straight movement, it is singing its song.

THE SONG OF WILD ANIMALS



חיות השדה אומרים: ברוך הטוב והמטיב.
The beasts of the field [wild animals] say: **Blessed is He who is good and does good.**

Wild animals sing of Hashem's unconditional kindness.

Unlike domesticated animals, which are fed by their masters in exchange for their various services, wild animals are not cared for by man. Nonetheless, the Altruistic Creator does not forsake them. They sing, “**Blessed is He who is good and does good**”, constantly, to the myriads of beings that are dependent upon Him alone and have nothing to give Him in return.

We must be willing to open our scope of kindness beyond that which gives us a good feeling and good returns. The ultimate "true kindness" is that which is bestowed to the deceased who cannot reciprocate at all.¹ Anonymous kindnesses are similarly “true”. We should learn to swallow the bitterness of an unreturned favor or greeting, and do favors even for those who have wronged us. It is specifically unappreciative people who most give us the opportunity to join the choir of the wild animals, and sing the song of Hashem's selfless, unconditional kindness.²

¹ The blessing הטוב והמטיב, the source of this song, was formulated at the time that the tens of thousands of corpses from the Beitar massacre were found not to have rotted after much time had passed, and were then honorably buried. This kindness to the dead that do not reciprocate was the ultimate unconditional kindness. Cf. Malbim.

² Note: The message of this song is a generalization. In certain cases, excessive kindness to an ingrate can be purposeless and even detrimental.

THE SONG OF THE GAZELLE¹



צָבִי אָמַר: וְאֲנִי אֲשִׁיר עֶזְךָ וְאַרְנֶן לְבִקֶּר חֲסָדְךָ כִּי הָיִיתָ
מִשְׁגָּב לִי וּמְנוּס בְּיוֹם צָר לִי. (תהילים נט, יז)

The gazelle says: And I will sing of Your might,
and I will praise Your kindness in the morning,
for You have been a bastion for me, and a refuge
on the day of my distress.

The gazelle sings of Hashem's protection and deliverance of His creatures, and of His nation in particular.

The gazelle symbolizes flight for survival. With its swift legs and slender, nimble figure, it is perfectly suited for escape from its many predators.² It is a highly alert animal, and even when fleeing, it keeps an eye on its predators.³ When the night ends and its adversaries return to their dens, and the gazelle rises for another day of existence, its survival is a song to its Creator no less than that which King David sang when he was saved from his enemies. Its song also symbolizes the Jewish nation's salvation from exile and its many predators, with the approaching dawn of the final redemption.

On a more personal scale, we too have “nighttimes” of travail in our lives. It's easy to remember to call to Hashem for help, but we need to also remember to thank Him and sing to Him when “the morning comes” and He saves us. By doing so, we may soon merit to sing to Hashem for the final redemption, when the sun will rise and never set again.⁴

¹ The more popular English translation of Tzvi is “deer”, which has reliable sources [See Tosafos Chulin :נט]. However, “gazelle” appears to be more accurate for various reasons. [See Sichas Chulin and הצומח והחי במשנה.] The exact translation is mostly irrelevant, since the message of the song applies to either creature. Moreover, some consider “צבי” to also refer to a family of animals that includes the deer, as well [ערכי לה"ק באהלי יששכר].

² Some can run at bursts of an incredible 100km/h, or run at a sustained speed of 50 km/h. [Wikipedia]

³ מדרש שה"ש בסופו.

⁴ Commentary based on R' Chaim Kanievsky, *Shir HaChaim*, and R' D. Orlofsky.

THE SONG OF THE ELEPHANT



פִּיל אוֹמֵר: מֶה גָּדֹל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ ה' מֵאֵד עֲמֻקּוֹ מִחֲשַׁבְתֶּיךָ.
(תהילים צב, ו)

The elephant says: **How great are Your deeds, Hashem!**
Very deep are Your thoughts.

The elephant sings of Hashem's great deeds that He performs with incalculable wisdom.

Elephant in Hebrew is "פִּיל", which is related to the word "פֶּלֶא", meaning wonder.¹ Its huge size, elongated trunk, and overlarge ears are unique in the animal kingdom. It is an imposing mass of tough flesh armed with spear-like ivory tusks, yet it feeds on nothing more than simple vegetation. One can be certain that all of its strange features were in truth designed with deep wisdom. It was given a trunk since a long neck for feeding would not be able to hold its giant head. If it were carnivorous, it would be difficult for it to hunt enough meat to sustain its colossal body. As a massive being of wondrous design, it sings of the profound Divine wisdom within all of Hashem's great deeds.

Standing in the orchestra of the world, do not crane your neck to try to read the music notes of your neighbor. Your instrument and part are designed exactly according to your own abilities. Rejoice in your lot and play your part wholeheartedly. The Master Composer has arranged a song perfect beyond comprehension.²

¹ Due to its unusual characteristics, our Sages teach that, in some instances, one who sees an elephant must recite the blessing "*Meshaneh HaBerios*", meaning, "Blessed is He who makes diverse creatures,"

² This song is excerpted from the psalm about the World to Come. Only then, when the world reaches its final state of perfection, will we be clearly able to perceive the true intent of Hashem's great deeds.

THE SONG OF THE LION

The lion says:
Hashem will
go out like a
mighty man;
like a warrior
He will invoke
passion. He
will trumpet
and shout; His
enemies
He will
overpower.



אֲרִיָּה אֹמֵר:
ה' כְּגִבּוֹר
יֵצֵא כְּאִישׁ
מִלְחָמוֹת
יַעֲרִי קְנָאָה
יִרְעֵ אֶף
יִצְרִיחַ עַל
אֹיְבָיו יִתְגַּבֵּר.
(ישעיה מב, יג)

The lion sings of Hashem's majesty and fearless command of His world.

The lion is the “king of wild animals”. The male lion is crowned with a majestic mane and sits lazily like a Pharaoh. Its roar silences all in earshot, the way all are quiet when a king speaks.¹ It hunts fearlessly, consuming its prey alive², unlike other predators that first kill their prey and then commonly drag their food back to their lairs to eat in safety. It symbolizes the ultimate King and Warrior, Hashem, and is engraved on His Throne of Glory. It sings of Hashem vanquishing His enemies without fear.

We should take pride in our heritage and in the Jewish majesty that runs through our veins.³ It is we who represent Hashem's kingship in the world and our every fulfillment of Hashem's will gives voice to the celestial lion etched on the Throne of Glory.



¹ Gr"a.

² Rosh.

³ King David, as well as other Jewish leaders, are compared to lions.

THE SONG OF THE BEAR



לב אומר: ישאו מדבר ועריו חצרים תשב קדר ירנו ישגי סלע מראש הרים
יצנחו. ישימו לה' כבוד ותהללו באיים יגידו. (ישעיה מב, יא-יב)

The bear says: **The wilderness and its cities will raise [their voices and also] Kedar who dwell in fenced areas. The dwellers of stone will exult; from the mountain-tops they will call. They will attribute honor to Hashem, and His praise they will relate in the islands.**

The bear sings that Hashem's world does not deserve to rest until it reaches its desired state of completion.

The bear is always restless, constantly looking for food and drink.¹ Even if chained, it will not stop moving.² As it “raises its voice in the wilderness”, it is singing of the future redemption, the restored holy land will raise its voice in jubilant song.³ Until then, as long as the King does not rule openly in His kingdom, the restless bear expresses that the world does not deserve to be at ease. The bear's arousal from its death-like hibernation after each winter symbolizes the revival of the dead, when “the dwellers of stone⁴ will awaken”.⁵

The bear reminds us that until the world has reached its rectified state and Hashem's Presence has returned to its holy resting place, a Jew cannot be fully at rest. We should never feel bored. Every part of our lives is there for a reason. And every second of activity is a bearlike song to our King.

¹ Gr"a, quoted by R' Chaim Kanievsky.

² Its physical features are also wild, with blubbery flesh and long hair. [Talmud Megilla]

³ R' Chaim Kanievsky, cf. there how his commentary differs.

⁴ I.e. within stone graves

⁵ Targum. This final point was drawn from the Perek Shira of Feldheim Publishers by R' Worenklein, with permission. See more there. The bear awakens and then moves relentlessly, paralleling the revival of the dead, followed by the world rejoicing.

THE SONG OF THE WOLF



זָאב אֹמֵר: עַל כָּל דְּבַר־פֶּשַׁע עַל שׂוֹר עַל חֲמוֹר עַל שֶׁהָ עַל שְׁלֵמָה עַל כָּל אֲבֵדָה אֲשֶׁר
יֹאמֵר כִּי הוּא זֶה עַד הָאֱלֹהִים יֵבֹא דְבַר שְׁנִיָּהֶם אֲשֶׁר יִרְשִׁיעַן אֱלֹהִים יְשֻׁלֵּם שְׁנִיָּים
לְרַעְהוּ. (שְׁמוֹת כב, ח)

The wolf says: **For every matter of crime, for an ox, for a donkey, for a sheep, for a garment, for any lost object, about which he will say, “this is it”, to the judges will the matter of the two come. He who the judges incriminate shall pay two-fold to his fellow.**

The wolf sings of Hashem’s strict justice towards criminals, and how crime does not pay.

Wolves are the most notorious predators of livestock.¹ They attack like a band of thieves, preferring the darkness of the night² and employing tactics of trickery³. They possess aggressive and brazen natures, sometimes attacking even when not hungry⁴. They sing however of Hashem’s justice – upon wolves – when the shepherds strike back at the them. Their song is the Torah law regarding a shepherd from whom livestock were stolen, that the thief must repay doubly.⁵

Although outright wolf-like theft may be unthinkable to us, the fruitlessness of crime is a lesson with innumerable applications. Whenever we abstain from all too common questionable gains, we turn the wolf’s wail into a Divine song.

¹ "הזאב חוטף יותר מכל החיות" – בראשית רבה צט, ג.

² It is specifically a covert thief who usually steals at night who has to pay double, but not a mugger. Since the covert thief is sensible enough to fear being caught, but ignores the Judge on high, he deserves stricter punishment. Hameir.

³ Wolves have been known to lure the shepherds away from the flocks with part of the pack while the rest of the pack attacks the defenseless sheep. Daas Shalom.

⁴ Daas Shalom, quoting Malbim (כז, יחזקאל כב, כז).

⁵ Interpretation of Pasuk from Targum Yonasan. The concept of paying double has been explained in different ways. Either it is simply a stringency against the wicked, which applies to the wolf who is viciously repelled. Alternatively, the Torah obligates thieves to pay double to account for times when they stole and were not caught, and so too is the wolf punished for previous wolf attacks. Knaf Renanim. The wolf’s howl may symbolize its bewailing of its lot, being hated by man, although rightly so.

THE SONG OF THE FOX



שועל אומר: הוי בנה ביתו בלא צדק ועליותיו
בלא משפט ברעהו יעבד חנם ופעלו לא יתן לו.
(ירמיה כב, יג)

The fox says: **Woe is he who builds his house unjustly and his lofts illegally. For his fellow he will work for free and his wages he will not pay him.**

The fox sings how sly trickery is useless in Hashem's just world.

The fox is classically known to be sly and cunning, especially in the way it steals produce from farmers. It also has a sharp appearance, with pointy ears, and twisted teeth¹. The sages illustrated many important moral lessons with fox parables, especially to bring to life the cunningness of the Yetzer Hara. Sometimes, the fox's craftiness proves to be its own undoing. Foxes tend to find dugout dens to live in, evicting smaller animals that may have previously dwelled there. Hunters outsmart them with trapping holes and catching foxes when they enter them.² They therefore sing of the prophet Yirmiyahu's lamentation over one who hires laborers to build his home and does not pay them. A home built unjustly shall not stand for long.³

Hashem's seal is truth and He abhors falsehood. We must build our lives, brick by brick, with straight honesty. It may be hard to do so at times, but the fox's song reminds us that only such a structure is worth building.

¹ See Pirkei Avos (טו, ב) in the Bartenura commentary. The fox also seems to be self-consciously aware of its thefts: it looks behind itself to see if it's being followed — unusual behavior for a predator. Midrash Shir Hashirim (לג, ב), as explained by the author of Sichas Chulin. For more on the fox's nature, see ארצ'ה הידועות.

² Birkas Shir.

³ It is fitting that abandoned homes often become occupied by foxes, who sing this song. Knaf Renanim.

THE SONG OF THE HUNTING DOG



זִרְזִיר אֹמֵר: רְנֵנוּ צְדִיקִים בְּה' לְיֹשְׁרִים נְאוּה תְהִלָּה.
(תהילים לג, א)

The hunting dog says: **Righteous ones, laud Hashem, to the upright praise is fitting.**

The hunting dog sings of the wholehearted praise that is due to Hashem.

The hunting dog runs swiftly to hunt wild animals on behalf of its master. Remarkably, although carnivorous, it restrains itself from eating the animals that it traps in order to keep it for its master. It therefore sings of the righteous who serve Hashem while withholding themselves from deriving personal benefit connected to their service. It specifies two types of righteous people in its song. The first is "צדיקים" – righteous – those who consistently struggle to do what is right. The second is "ישרים" – upright – those who have already straightened their character and serve Hashem naturally. Through its wholehearted devotion to its master, it declares that "the praise of the ישרים is fitting".¹

Whenever we struggle and sacrifice to do the will of Hashem, our actions constitute a tremendous Divine praise. However, we should try to perfect ourselves to the extent that our service to Him is a natural expression of love – like the song of the hunting dog.

¹ Knaf Renanim. Cf. Eight Chapters of Rambam defines צדיק and ישר the same way.

THE SONG OF THE CAT



חַתּוּל אָמַר: אֶרְדּוּף
אוֹיְבֵי וְאֲשִׁיגֶם וְלֹא
אָשׁוּב עַד כְּלוֹתָם.
(תהילים יח, לח)

The cat says:
**I will pursue my
enemies and
reach them, and
I shall not turn
back until I
annihilate
them.**

The cat sings of the virtue of modesty, and of the confidence of one who trusts in Hashem.

The cat is an adept hunter which, despite its small size, will pounce fiercely when intent on its prey.¹ It sings the battle-cry of King David, whose noble intention in destroying his nation's enemies gave him the boldness and strength to succeed.² That cat's confidence is bolstered by the merit of its characteristic modesty, particularly evident through that which it performs its bodily functions out of sight.³ We are taught that modesty in these matters is a winning merit in battle.⁴

We, too, should do our best to keep our habitats clean from both physical and spiritual obscenities, allowing Hashem to rest His Divine Presence upon us and bless us. Only when we emulate the cat's song can we leap at our goals with its nimbleness.

¹ Modern housecats are more docile than those of the olden days. This song pertains more to the latter. שיחת חולין ע' שמו.

² The cat's typical prey is the common household pest, the mouse, which has a symbolism of wickedness. In some versions of Perek Shira, their songs are grouped together. It follows that the cat's song symbolizes the hunting of the wicked.

³ The Talmud (עירובין ק:) teaches that if the Torah would not have been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat. Rashi explains that it defecates privately and covers its excrement. Rabbeinu Chaneinu and the Rashash understand that it refers to that which it copulates out of sight. [הערוך הביא כשניהם. ע"ע מגדים חדשים].

⁴ The Torah (דברים כג, טו) commands us to keep our encampment clean of waste and morally holy in order to accommodate Hashem's presence, and thereby He can protect us and help us to overpower our foes (סיפרא רנ"ה, הובא בלחם רב). More specifically, regarding modesty in the lavatory, there is a Talmudic teaching that one who conducts himself so merits protection from snakes and scorpions, which are amongst the more potent prey of the cat. (בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו ע"פ ברכות סב., ושם מזכיר גם שמירה ממוזיקים). For this reason, cats are mostly immune to snake poison (ע"פ רש"י שבת קכח:).

CHAPTER SIX

CREEPING CREATURES & DOG

THE SONG OF CREEPING CREATURES



שֶׁרָצִים אֲמָרִים:
יִשְׁמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֲשִׂיו
בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן יִגִּילוּ
בְּמֶלְכָם. (תהילים קמט, ב)
Creeping creatures
say: Yisrael shall
rejoice in its Maker;
the children of Zion
shall delight in its
King.

Creeping creatures sing how Hashem's nation ought to rejoice over His raising them to spiritual heights.

“Creeping creatures” refers to all low-crawling lifeforms, including rodents, lizards, turtles, and insects, which the Torah pronounces repulsive and spiritually impure. Hashem commanded us not to eat them and contaminate our elevated and sensitive souls.¹ The creeping creatures sing that the Jewish nation rejoices upon its Creator and delights upon its King for raising them above all the nations and sanctifying them with His Divine mitzvos.²

Hashem's mitzvos were not designed to limit us; they were designed to lift us up from the earthly pull of our bodies and the world we live in. Before performing any Mitzvah, we bless Hashem for sanctifying us. When we bless Him, serve Him, and live our Judaism – with joy – we bring out song from the countless multitudes of creeping creatures across the Earth.

¹ Hashem even declared, “Would it be that I raised the Jewish nation up from Egypt only so that they would not contaminate themselves with creeping creatures, it would have been enough for me.” (בבא מציעא סא:) This implies that when we were still in Egypt, we were as lowly as creeping creatures. [Based on Sforno (שמות א, ז)]

² Based on Likutei Maamarim.

THE SONG OF GREATER CREEPING CREATURES



אֱלִים שְׁבִשְׂרָצִים אֹמְרִים:
אֲשֶׁתְּךָ כְּגֶפֶן פְּרִיָּה בְּיַרְכְּתִי
בֵּיתְךָ בְּיָדְךָ כְּשִׁתְּלֵי זֵיתִים סָבִיב
לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ. (שם, קכח, ג)
The greater creeping
creatures say: **Your wife is
like a grape-vine in the
inner chambers of your
house; your children are
like olive shoots around
your table.**

Greater creeping creatures sing how the more Hashem's nation are trod upon in exile, the more He sees fit to multiply them.

“Greater creeping creatures” are the low-crawling vertebrates.¹ These have the combined qualities of being highly prolific, yet physically strong, unlike invertebrates, such as worms and other weak insects.² They symbolize how Hashem sides with the wretched, and the smaller and more repulsive they are, the more they proliferate. Their song refers primarily to the Jewish people in the Egyptian exile, who, the more they were detested, made insignificant, and trod upon, the more they propagated.³ Their “wives were like grape-vines”, bearing “clusters” of babies each time, who were each sturdy “like olive shoots”.⁴

When in exile, and especially when outside our land, our nation's characteristic royal status is unrecognized. We are, disliked and appear to have the lowly standing of foreign citizens. This should not discourage us, since it has a hidden blessing. The more that anti-Semitism degrades us to seem like vermin, the more we shall increase mightily – and sing their song.

¹ Based on Shira Chadasha and Yaavetz. This translation might be supported by the term in the verse quoted by the Yaavetz "וישרצו וירבו ויעצמו", sing "עצם" alludes that they are vertebrates.

² For example, a queen ant can bear 300,000 ants in one day, but it is not a fitting symbol of propagation, since they are all invertebrates, and are therefore weak, short-lived, and altogether insignificant.

³ Based on Yaavetz and a Midrash he quotes. The main opinion is that they bore six babies at a time, like the mouse, but the song seems not to exclusively apply to it, since it has own its song. Vermin can be quite damaging, contrary to the creeping creatures' general message of rejoicing upon Hashem, nonetheless, their very propagation is a positive song.

⁴ Grapevines are more fruitful than olive trees, but have flimsy branches and vulnerable fruits, as opposed to olive trees, which are strong, with tough fruit, and even their leaves do not fall off in the winter. [See קובץ תפארת עמ' שמג for sources.]

THE SONG OF THE SNAKE



נָחָשׁ אָמַר: סוּמָךְ ה' לְכָל הַנָּפְלִים וְזוֹקֵף לְכָל
הַכְּפוּפִים. (תהילים קמה, יד)

The snake says: **Hashem supports all of the fallen and straightens all of the bent.**

The snake sings of Hashem's mercy even upon those that He punishes.

The snake is the symbol of evil and sin. It has a wicked appearance, slithering and hissing, brandishing long venomous fangs and displaying its forked tongue. The snake is responsible for more human deaths than any other animal¹. Animals generally kill only what they can eat, whereas the snake kills creatures much too large for it to swallow.² The primordial snake poisoned the previously pure world with sin and almost destroyed it entirely. Hashem therefore diminished it with ten curses³ and cut off its legs, bringing it right down to the ground. Even so, He “supported its fall” and allowed it to continue to exist – and even to certain extent to raise itself “straight” – and sing of Hashem's mercy.⁴

If even the snake, which brought destruction and misery to the world, is supported by Hashem, all the more so should we seek to support the unfortunate of our nation. Thereby, we let the base tones of the world's orchestra rise from the song of the fallen snake.

¹ CTE. Malaria carrying mosquitos kill many more, but only indirectly, through the spreading of disease.

² For this reason, the speaker of Lashon Hara is compared to the snake, since he too strikes without gain.

³ See Shlah who lists them.

⁴ Based on Metzudos. Hashem supports the fallen from total collapse but He does not necessarily prevent the fall totally. Some commentaries quote the Midrash how even though the snake had to eat עפר (dust), its food is plentiful and even though its legs of mobility were removed, its slim form now can slip through crevices and escape capture.

THE SONG OF THE SCORPION

עֲקָרְבַּ אֹמֵר: טוֹב ה' **לְכָל יִרְחָמִיו עַל כָּל־
מַעֲשָׂיו.** (תהילים קמה, ט)

The scorpion says:
**Hashem is good to
all and His mercy is
upon all of His
creatures.**



The scorpion sings how Hashem's mercy and kindness are upon all creatures.

Scorpions are harmful creatures – some deadly – which will smite all that approach them without hesitation. Nonetheless, Hashem's care for all of His creatures extends even to them¹. Furthermore, He fashioned them to be highly prolific, commonly bearing up to sixty larvae at a time.² The Zohar teaches that even harmful pests such as scorpions which seem to contribute nothing to the world serve purposes unknown to us, such as to punish the wicked.³ Therefore, cruel scorpions paradoxically sing of Hashem's kindness and mercy to all.⁴

Hashem's traits of compassion and kindness are also inherent traits of His nation.⁵ The scorpion reminds us to spread our mercy even upon scorpion-like individuals, barring the few exceptions where mercy may bring detrimental effects.⁶ The further down mercy extends, the higher its song rises.

¹ Hashem designed scorpions to be able to live up to a year without food, although they do need water. Wikipedia.

² The Midrash classifies as the most prolific of שרצים.

³ See Zohar [ס"פ אמור], quoted in Nachalei Dvash, by R' Dovid Bamberger Shlita: וירא כל אשר עשה: והנה טוב מאוד, שעושיין שליחותא וכו'. ובכלא עביד קוב"ה שליחותיה דיליה, ועל דא "טוב ה' לכל ורחמיו על כל מעשיו".

⁴ Based on Knaf Renanim, Yashir Moshe, and צלצל כנפיים.

⁵ The third is "ביישנות" – bashfulness.

⁶ Even though some scorpions are dangerous, Hashem has mercy upon them so they could fulfil their purposes in the world, as explained by the abovementioned Zohar. Furthermore, they are generally not hazardous to humans, since they are nocturnal, and tend to keep out of cities altogether. Most scorpion bites have occurred when someone slept in the wild, or lifted up a rock and uncovered a scorpion hiding there during the day.

THE SONG OF THE SNAIL



שֶׁבִּלּוּל אֹמֶר:
כְּמוֹ שֶׁבִּלּוּל תַּמָּס יִהְיֶה
נִפְלֵ אִשָּׁת בֵּל חָזוּ שְׁמֶשׁ.
(תהילים נח, ט)

The snail says:
**Like a snail that
dissolves as it moves,
like the stillborn of a
woman, they cannot see
the sun.**

The snail sings how the merits of the wicked do not prevent Hashem from removing their harmful presence from society.

The snail is particularly sensitive to dehydration, and therefore prefers to seek food at night and after cooling rain. It excretes moisturizing slime as it slithers, and effectively melts in hot temperatures. It symbolizes wicked people who are protected by the merit of the Torah they have learned, in the same way a snail's shell protects it and maintains its hydration. Arrogantly, they move as slowly as the snail, but are just as vulnerable. The snail sings of King David's unique prayer regarding his enemies, who were Torah scholars, yet slandered and hunted him without cause. He requested that they should forget their Torah and melt like a dehydrated snail,¹ and not merit to enjoy reward for their Torah in the World to Come, "like a stillborn that does not see the light"².

Torah without mitzvos is like power without function. Hashem gave us the Torah for us to perfect ourselves and the whole world around us. From the song of the snail we learn to absorb our Torah into every fiber of our beings and merit its all-encompassing blessings.

¹ Based partially on Sforno.

² A fetus is the Sages' symbol of a soul in this world preparing to be born into the World to Come.

THE SONG OF THE ANT



נְמִלָּה אוֹמֶרֶת:
לֵךְ אֶל נְמִלָּה
עֹצֵל רָאָה
דְּרָכֶיהָ וְחָכָם.
(משלי ו, ו)

The ant says:
**Go to the ant,
lazy one, watch
its ways and
become wise.**

The ant sings of the virtue of industrious labor necessary to bring Hashem's world to fruition.

The ant is the epitome of industriousness. The wisest of men, King Shlomo, directed the lazy to go learn from the ant. Throughout the summer, it carries food many times its size in order to store it for the winter.¹ They function with discipline, and they not steal from each other, even though no supervisors stand over them.² They sing of the virtues by which the Creator's perfectly designed world thrives.

Productive usage of the human body and the mind is part of their natural function. Conversely, inaction fosters unhealthy, negative emotions. The more one labors, the more he will become inspired to achieve yet more, and he will be both physically and emotionally satiated. Ants succeed in their relatively insignificant lives through their healthy work ethics. We, whose lives are truly significant, and who need to amass enough Torah and mitzvos to last eternally, would be wise to learn from the song of the ant.

¹ Although it is a minute insect which requires as little as a wheat kernel and a half to live out its short lifespan, it hordes masses of grain with seeming foresight that perhaps it will live much longer. Tanchuma. The ants' methods of building their intricate colonies, tracking food, navigating their way back home, reproducing and expanding, attacking and defending, would put to shame the greatest of human armies.

² Rashi. See Eiruvין (יז), that if the Torah had not been given, we would have learned from ants to abstain from theft. Its provision for its own sustenance precludes the necessity to steal. On the opposite extreme, lazy unproductivity leans a person to dishonest gain.

THE SONG OF THE MOUSE



עֲכָבֵר אֹמֵר:

וְאַתָּה צָדִיק עַל כָּל הַבָּא עָלַי כִּי אֱמֶת עָשִׂיתָ וְאֲנִי הִרְשָׁעֵתִי.
(ע"פ נחמיה ט, לג [פרק שירה השלם])

The mouse says: **And You are righteous regarding all that befalls me because You have done truth and I have been wicked.**

The mouse sing of Hashem's justice in removing the thoroughly wicked from society.

The mouse breeds prolifically in every environment and is the most notorious of household pests. The Talmud terms it "wicked" because, although it has basic animal intelligence, it will nibble on and destroy clothing with no benefit to itself. If it sees abundant food, it calls its fellow mice to join in its plunder.¹ When it is caught, it sings of the deservedness of criminals' punishment.

If a Jew stumbles on a sin, he readily admits guilt and resolves to prevent a reoccurrence. If a calamity befalls him, he declares it to be a gift of atonement and moves on. A Jew turns sinfulness into righteousness and misery into praise. Even his very admission of guilt is a heavenly song.

¹ Talmud Yerushalmi (ב"מ, פ"ג, מ"ה), quoted by Sifsei Chaim.

THE SONG OF THE WEASEL¹

 <p>Weasel</p>	<p>חֲלֻדָּה אוֹמֶרֶת כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּיָהּ. (תהילים קנ, ו)</p> <p>The weasel says: Let all souls praise Hashem, Halleluka!</p>	 <p>Rat</p>  <p>Mole-rat</p>
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The weasel sings how the only worthwhile endeavor of every soul is to praise Hashem.

The weasel is the first and foremost of the eight contaminative creeping creatures. It burrows into the earth and it is also earthly in its nature, hoarding more food than it can eat. It symbolizes the earth's inhabitants, who similarly invest endlessly in this temporary world.² It sings that the only worthwhile endeavor is to praise Hashem.

Each soul is historically unique, and important enough for Hashem to inhale within it new life again and again. We should realize that the main reason we were given thinking souls is so that we recognize our Creator and praise Him as long as we live. When we do, we allow “all souls” – even lowly vermin – to praise the Creator.³

¹ The exact identity of the *Chulda* in *Perek Shira* is unknown. Generally, it is translated as “weasel” by Rashi, Chizkuni, and Radak. Sichas Chulin writes, based on the Rambam, that it can also refer to the rat, its modern Hebrew translation [ע"ע תורה שלמה ושמירת השרצים]. “Rat” is actually fits better with this song, since they are notorious hoarders, especially of shiny objects like coins which are useless to them, and they are also viler than weasels. A third possible translation is “mole-rat” [רס"ג, תרגום ירו' הובא בת"ש, ותלמוד ירו' מו"ק א, ד], which actually seems the best match for this song, since it has underground breathing capabilities unmatched amongst land animals, and can even rebreathe its exhaled air. It therefore sings that every נשימה – breath – should praise Hashem, as is expounded on this verse in the Midrash [ע' זמרת השמים והארץ]. It is also called “the most vile amongst Shratzim” [ע' ת"ש תנשמת/חולדה], and is clearly the intended *chulda* in the teaching: “All land creatures have counterparts at sea, except for the *chulda*.” I avoided translating so outright only because this is not the common reference of the word. The message of *chulda* is similar according to all translations.

² The song specifies “תהלל י-ה” and does not mention the usual four-letter name of Hashem, since the Sages teach [עירובין יח.] that once the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, it is enough for the world to praise Hashem with only this one half of the Name, symbolizing the *chulda*-like lowliness of the world without the holiness of the Shechina.

³ This sentence is actually an additional intention of the weasel's song, drawn from the Knaf Renanim, based on that which the *chulda* is the first and foremost contaminative Sheretz. See there further.

THE SONG OF THE DOGS



כָּלִבִּים אוֹמְרִים:
בָּאוּ נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה
וְנִכְרַעַה נִבְרָכָה
לִפְנֵי ה' עֲשֵׂנו.
(תהלים צה, ו)

The dogs say:
**Come, let us
prostrate
ourselves and
kneel, let us bow
before Hashem
our Maker.**

Dogs sing how all who Hashem created ought to subjugate themselves to their Maker wholeheartedly.

The dog is a dedicated and cherished pet that recognizes its master and subjugates itself entirely to his will. Dog in Hebrew is "כלב", which is a contraction of the words "כולו לב"¹, meaning "entirely heart". This refers to the dog's unashamed expression of its heart's will², as well as its wholehearted devotion to the master who feeds it, whom it will protect even at the risk of its own life. The dog sings that mankind, too, should serve the ultimate master, Hashem, with comparative allegiance.

Hashem has done more for us than any master has done for his servant and any king has done for his nation. He created us, removed us from our shackles of Egyptian slavery, and granted us the bounty of the world in His chosen land. Day by day, He provides us with our needs of food and shelter and a life far more blessed than that of a dog. And this is all nothing compared to what He has promised us in the future. If a dog can be loyal to its master for the sake of a dry bone³, all the more so we, who are capable of intelligent appreciation, should prostrate ourselves and serve Hashem with passionate love.⁴

¹ מהר"ל חידושי אגדות, הוריות יג. ומהרש"א סנהדרין צז.

² Even small dogs will bark impudently at beings many times their size.

³ See זוהר ויקרא סג. "Throw a dog a bone and it will lick the dust of your feet."

⁴ Sefer Ha'ikarim, R' Chaim Kanievsky, and others.

CONCLUSION OF PEREK SHIRA

רבי ישעיה תלמידו של רבי חנינא בן דוסא התענה חמש ושמונים תעניות. אמר: "כלבים שכתוב בהם, "והכלבים עזי נפש לא ידעו שבעה" יזכו לומר שירה?" וענה לו מלאך מן השמים ואמר לו, "ישעיה, עד מתי אתה מתענה על זה הדבר? שבועה מלפני המקום ברוך הוא, מיום שגילה סוד לחבקוק הנביא לא גילה דבר זה לשום בריה בעולם, אלא בשביל שתלמידו של אדם גדול אתה שלחוני מן השמים לזדקק אליך, ואמרו, כלבים כתיב בהם "ולכל ישראל לא יחרוך כלב לשונו" ולא עוד אלא שזכו לעבד עורות מצואתם שכותבין בהם תפילין ומזוזות וספר תורה, על כן זכו לומר שירה. ומה ששאלת, חזור לאחוריך ואל תוסיף בדבר הזה עוד, כמו שכתוב "שומר פיו ולשונו שומר מצרות נפשו". ברוך ה' לעולם אמן ואמן. ברוך ה' מציון שוכן ירושלים הללויה. ברוך ה' אלוהים אלוהי ישראל עושה נפלאות לבדו. וברוך שם כבודו לעולם וימלא כבודו את כל הארץ אמן ואמן.

R' Yeshaya, the disciple of R' Chanina Ben Dosa, fasted 85 fasts. He said, "Dogs, about whom it is written, "And the dogs are brazen-spirited; they do not know satiation", they should merit singing [to Hashem]? An angel answered him from the Heavens and said to him, "Yeshaya, until when shall you fast over this matter? It is an oath from before Hashem, [and] from the day that He revealed His secret to Chavakuk the prophet, He did not reveal this matter to any person in the world. However, since you are the disciple of a great man, I have been sent from the Heavens to answer you. They said: It is written about dogs "And to all of Yisrael a dog will not bark". And not only that, but they also merited that hides be treated using their excrement, upon which are written Tefillin, Mezuzos, and Sifrei Torah, they therefore merited to sing [to Hashem]. And regarding that which you asked, return backward and do not continue regarding this matter, as it is written: "One who protects his mouth and tongue protects himself from troubles." Blessed is Hashem forever, Amen and Amen. Blessed is Hashem from Zion, Who dwells in Jerusalem, Halleluya! Blessed is Hashem, God, the God of Yisrael, Who does wonders alone. And blessed is the name of His glory forever, and may His glory fill the world, Amen and Amen.

R' Yeshaya was deeply troubled as to how the brazen dog merited to sing Hashem's praise, and therefore he fasted 85 fasts¹ and begged Hashem to

¹ The Gematriah of "פה", mouth, is 85. He wanted to understand the dogs' mouth's Divine song. [Source in Shir Hachaim. The Knaf Renanim explains that his number of fasts corresponded to the number of beings that sing in Perek Shira. There are varying versions as to the exact number.] The

explain the matter to him. Although dogs have redeeming qualities, they Kabalistically symbolize the similarly brazen and insatiable wicked.¹ He was essentially asking a profound philosophical question: “Why do the wicked succeed?”

He was told that this had already been asked by the prophet Chavakuk, regarding the success of Yisrael’s brazenly insatiable oppressors throughout their exiles.² He sketched a circle around himself and refused to leave it until Hashem would answer him. Hashem reprimanded him for demanding an explanation to this Godly area of wisdom, telling him instead that the nation must faithfully await His coming. R’ Yeshaya was similarly admonished, and told “not to continue regarding this matter”.³

Nevertheless, the angel went on to answer the question, explaining that the dog’s brazenness only expresses itself against those that are lacking in holiness, in the same way that fire only burns flammable elements. The angel explained that this is why no dog barked at the Jewish nation when they left Egypt in holiness, accompanied by the Divine Presence. He added that since the dog is not essentially evil, it also merited that its most impure element, its excrement, is used for the treatment and removal of hair – which, likewise, symbolizes impurity – from hides used for holy writings.⁴

This passage teaches that all elements of the world praise Hashem. Whether good or bad, whether we understand or cannot, “Blessed is the name of His glory forever, and may His glory fill the world, Amen and Amen.”

criticism of those that are never satisfied was particularly difficult for a disciple of R’ Chanina Ben Dosa, who survived on a meagre carob diet, and yet was satisfied. [הפלאה, בחת"ס לקמן]

¹ It is noteworthy that it did not bother him that snakes and pigs sing. One possible answer is that snakes and pigs sing through their very lowliness, but the dog’s song expresses its virtue ע"ע שירת החיים, והחי במשנה לגבי כלבים בזמן חז"ל.

² Chavakuk asked so explicitly in this incident in Pasuk 'ד. See Rashi and Gra, quoted in Hameir.

³ חלק ע"פ חתם סופר דרשות א', בשלח תקע"א. ע' חבקוק ב' ו ורש"י וילק"ש שם. ישעיה כא, ו. וע' יעב"ץ שהציע שנשמח ר' ישעיה גילגול הנביא ישעיה, וכמדומה שכיונתי לו, וסמך ממה שאמר ישעיה זה הכתוב "והכלבים". ע"פ זה יש לבאר שאמרו לו לחזור לאחוריו, להסתכל על גלגולו הקודם בהיותו ישעיה הנביא ודרש שחבקוק ישאל כן, ולא יחזור לעשות כן עוד, ומובן שתיקן ענין חטא פה ישעיה שקרא להעם טמא שפתיים, וטעם פ"ה תעניות כחלק מכפרתו, ויש לעיין.

⁴ חתם סופר, דרשות ת'. וע"ע שם. גם יתפרש שזכו לומר שירה בפה שלהם, מאחר שזכו לעבד עורות לס"ת שפרשיותיו לפחות פ"ה אותיות. ע"פ חת"ס דלעיל.


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R' Shmuel Kraines is the son of the late Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines of South Africa. R' Shmuel studied in Yeshivas Ateres Yisrael in Yerushalayim, and subsequently in various Kollels. He lives with his family in Modiin Ilit, Israel.

To find out more about his ongoing Perek Shira project, and his ongoing freely-distributed Perek Shira videos in particular, visit his website songofexistence.org. These professional and highly inspirational videos are featured on major websites such as TorahAnytime.com and Aish.com in the English language. Sponsorship opportunities are available to add to the series or to translate it into other languages. He may be contacted regarding this and any other Perek Shira matter at info@songofexistence.org.



PEREK SHIRA
— SONG OF EXISTENCE —



**Hashem created the universe to sing to Him.
Each element of creation brings out a different aspect,
revealing Hashem's majesty and flawless benevolence.
The songs are constant, filling the Earth and the Heavens.
Even if the animals and inanimate creations have no mouths to sing,
their very existence and function form a constant song of Divine beauty.
Yet, they can only properly express their message if we, the conductors,
utter the verses that they sing and live according to their meaning.
These songs, collected in "Perek Shira", were traditionally
composed by Dovid Hamelech and Shlomo Hamelech.
The Sages speak at length of the power of its recital
and the reward of one who involves himself with it.**