

INTRODUCTION TO PEREK SHIRA

Every human heart naturally appreciates the beauty of the world. Yet, not all are aware of its songs. To the attentive listener, the entire universe is singing in concert to its Creator.

The blazing sun illuminates the darkness, basking the world in its warmth and nourishing all plant life. Man cannot even gaze at its brilliance, and he certainly cannot fathom the greatness of its Creator, about Whom it sings without pause.

Yet the sun is but one instrument in the comprehensive orchestra of the universe. Equal wonder can be found in a rain drop, a breath of air, or slice of bread. The simplest living organism depends on a precisely balanced life support system of unfathomable complexity. Consider the nutrient rich soil, the temperate and oxygenated atmosphere, the perpetual water-cycle, the ingenious internal workings of all flora and fauna by which they feed, function, and reproduce, and the continuous, interconnected food chain. On top, intelligent mankind is enthroned in grandness, and all testify of the greatness and the kindness of the Creator. The masterly designed world is entirely filled with His glory. Even the sea is populated with colorful fish, the sky decorated with melodious birds, and the endless outer space is bejeweled with stars and planets, dancing in their orbits.

Every element of the natural world sings of a different aspect: some of the Creator's grandeur, some of His salvation, some of His greatness, some of His awesomeness, some of His supremacy, – and all sing of His kindness. In addition to telling of His glory, the beings also teach of His virtuous ways that we are to emulate. The Sages teach that if the Torah would not have been given to us as a guide, we would have learned modesty from the cat, avoidance of theft from the industrious ant, and marital loyalty from the dove.¹ The same is true about each of His magnificent creatures.

The universe's songs were compiled into a collection called "Perek Shira", which is said to be authored by King David and King Solomon.² Even though animals and inanimate creatures have no mouths with which to sing, their natures and functions are expressions of Divine praise.³

However, the full manifestation of these songs is only when we, intelligent mankind, comprehend them and voice them. Our praise is one of the primary reasons for the universe's creation, as the Midrash relates: "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.'⁴ "Moreover, the Kabbalists teach that each creature – even every blade of grass – has its own angel in Heaven, and only

¹ עירובין ק:

² ע' בית אלוקים, יעב"ץ, והכל ישבחוך בשם הזהר.

³ מהר"ל.

⁴ אותיות דר' עקיבא

when we recite the world's songs is each angel empowered to sing in harmony. The beings themselves are sustained only in the merit of these songs.⁵

Therefore, when a Jew recites Perek Shira, it is as if he is conducting an unfathomably powerful orchestra of cosmic proportions, creating Divine music too beautiful for the human ear to hear. Understandably, the Sages speak at length of the immense reward for its recital. Many have a custom to recite it every morning, at the same time that the world awakens and begins its song anew.⁶

Perek Shira will open to you a new way to look at the world. You will perceive that birds chirp not only to mark their territory. They are singing sweetly to the Creator, incessantly reminding us that every day is filled with goodness and pleasantness. Perek Shira will also illuminate your view of other people, and of yourself. You will obtain the tools to contemplate how each person has his or her own unique purpose and an immutable song in Hashem's universe. A person sings not only through specific life-accomplishments, but even with day-to-day life, with all of its ups and downs, like the rising and falling of a beautiful melody. This Song of Existence has been playing since the dawn of time, adding layer upon layer of meaning, converging steadily towards its climatic culmination, with the coming Redemption.

<<<<Section two>>>>

When King David completed writing his book of Tehillim, he felt prideful and asked Hashem, "Is there a creature that You created in Your world that praises You more than I do?" Thereupon, a frog told him, "David, do not feel prideful, for I recite more songs and praises than you."

King David's praise was limited to his waking hours, and only when he was not busy with matters of his kingdom, but the frog's ceaseless croaking can be heard day and night. Whether the story of the frog speaking to King David was a literal occurrence or a figurative portrayal, it certainly alludes to deeper mystical matters.⁷ Yet, its principle teaching is clear: even King David, the sweet singer of Israel, ought not to feel arrogant about his Divine praises, since he was only fulfilling his expected role for which he was created. Moreover, even the mindless natural world, including the humble frog and countless other creatures, sing to the Creator constantly, no less than mankind. However, their latent songs remain unsung until man appreciates them and recites them – with Perek Shira.

Every morning, when the world rejuvenates and its multitudes of beautiful creatures awaken to sing anew, listen! They are beckoning to each of us to follow their lead and sing to our Creator – Who is waiting for our praise.

⁵ ע' נפש החיים (א, יא), יעב"ץ, ושער מאמרי רשב"י

⁶ בית אלוקים

⁷ ע' יעב"ץ