

# B'shallach - The Importance of Song

Source Sheet by Rabbi Marina Yergin  
Based on a Text Sheet by Rabbi Alexandra Klein

שמות ט"ו:א-ה'

(א) אָז יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאָמֵר {ס} אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָאָה {ס} סוּס וְרֶכֶבֹּו רָמָה בַיָּם: {ס} (ב) עָזִי וְזַמְרָתִי לַיהוָה יִהְיֶה־לִּי לִישׁוּעָה {ס} זֶה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֲנִי־הוּוּ {ס} אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי וְאֶרְמְמָנָהוּ: {ס} (ג) יְהוָה אֵישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ: {ס} (ד) מִרְכַּבַּת פָּרָעָה וַחֲיָלוּ יָרָה בַיָּם {ס} וּמִבְּחַר נְשָׁלֶשׁוּ טָבָעוּ בַיָּם־סוּרָה: {ס} (ה) תְּהַמֵּת יְכַסִּימוּ יָרְדוּ בְּמַצּוֹלֹת כְּמוֹ־אָבֹן: {ס}

## Exodus 15:1-5

(1) Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD. They said: I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea. (2) The LORD is my strength and might; He is become my deliverance. This is my God and I will enshrine Him; The God of my father, and I will exalt Him. (3) The LORD, the Warrior— LORD is His name! (4) Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the pick of his officers Are drowned in the Sea of Reeds. (5) The deeps covered them; They went down into the depths like a stone.

## WHY did the people sing?

### Rashi on Exodus 15:1:1

אז ישיר משה THEN SANG MOSES *Az yashir Moshe*... When [Moses] saw the miracle [of the parted sea], it rose in his heart that he should sing a song.

### Bamidbar Rabbah 23:4

From the day that God created the world until Israel stood by the sea, there was not a single person who said a song to God except for Israel. God created the first man and he didn't say a song. God saved Abraham from the fiery furnace and from the kings and he didn't say a song. And also Isaac [was saved] from the knife and he didn't say a song and Jacob [was saved] from the angel and from Esau and from the men of Shechem and he didn't say a song. When Israel came to the sea and it parted for them, they immediately said a song before God, as it says Then Moses sang and the people of Israel.

## HOW did the people sing?

### Sotah 30a

...Rabbi Akiva taught that when the Jewish people ascended from the split sea, they set their eyes on reciting a song of gratitude to God. And how did they recite the song? In the same manner as an adult reciting hallel on behalf of a congregation, as his/her reading enables all who hear it to fulfill their obligation. Thus, the congregation listens and

merely needs to recite after him/her the chapter headings of hallel. So too, by the sea, Moses said: “I will sing unto the Lord”, and the people said after him: “I will sing unto the Lord.” Moses continued and said: “For God is highly exalted” (Exodus 15:1), and they said once again the chapter heading: “I will sing unto the Lord.”

[But] Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Yosei HaGelili, said: [No,] the Jewish people sang just like a child reciting hallel. The congregation who hears him must repeat after him all that he says, word for word, because the recitation of hallel by a child is insufficient for fulfilling one’s obligation. So too, by the sea, Moses said: “I will sing unto the Lord”, and the people said after Moses: “I will sing to the Lord.” Moses said: “For He is highly exalted,” and they said after him the same words: “For He is highly exalted.”

[Finally,] Rabbi Neḥemya said: [Not so.] They sang the song of the sea like a cantor, who recites aloud the introductory prayers and blessings before Shema in the synagogue; as he/she begins by saying the first words of the blessing, and they repeat after him the initial words and continue reciting the rest of Shema together with him/her in unison. So too, in the song of the sea, Moses began and then everyone recited the entire song together with him.

## Why do WE sing?

### **Berakhot 6a**

Where there is song, there is prayer.

### **Joey Weisenberg on**

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/why-music-is-fundamental-to-jewish-prayer/>

"Music is the most immaterial and ephemeral of all the art forms. We can't see music, we can't grasp it in our hands, but we can feel it working through us and the world. As such, music represents our connection to the divine, to each other, to everything. Music is a wordless prayer that opens up our imaginations to the divine source of all life.

...To be a musician then is to be an activist of the spirit. But the music doesn't do this on its own. It requires us to react to the music, to open up, to change along with it. We must allow the sound of our singing to awaken us, to bring us to positive action, to let song help us to do our work in the world with sensitivity and grace.

Ultimately, melodies are just a bunch of notes—whether they're fundamentally meaningless or transcendent depends entirely upon how we choose to listen, how we choose to direct our intentions, and whether we let ourselves join the song. Singing signals not an escape from life but an imaginative attempt to remind us what is yet possible. Music offers us rung after rung to climb to the heavens, where we hope to discover our best selves, so that we can then emulate that holiness in our regular lives. Let us find our melodies, and let us find our prayers, and let us bring the world to life."