

The Sabbath morning Torah reading for פרשת בשלה includes 2 songs, אז ישיר, and the Haftorah of וְתָשַׁר דְּבוּרָה. On the Seventh day of Passover we again read אז ישיר but with a different Haftorah, שירת דוד (Shmuel 2, Chapter 22) which is also שירה. Offering שירה is not limited just to these 2 occasions. Rather, שירה is a fundamental principle of Judaism. Certain situations in Jewish life require that we recite על הכוס. For example, we recite קידוש and הבדלה over a כוס. Rambam says that even according to the opinion that ברכת המזון does not require כוס, using one fulfills a קיום שירה על היין. The same thing applies to the blessings associated with marriage, בורא מאורי האש ובשמים, אשר קדש ידיד נבטן, אירוסין ונשואין, on a festival, מוסדר על הכוס, constitutes a קיום שירה. Every blessing that is associated with a cup of wine, מוסדר על הכוס, constitutes a קיום שירה and fulfills the dictum of אין אומרים שירה אלא על היין.

One can also achieve שירה without reciting it over a cup of wine. For example, הלל on a festival fulfills the requirement of שירה. The קדושה that we recite 3 times daily is a שירה. When we say כשם שמקדישים אותו בשמי מרום, we refer to the שירה recited by the angels in heaven. We try to emulate them and express שירה to Gd. Chazal held that our שירה is connected to the one recited by the angels, as the angels cannot recite שירה until כנסת ישראל recite their שירה. Apparently Chazal felt that שירה fulfills קדושת שמונה עשרה just like אז ישיר משה.

Our פסוקי דזמרה recited daily and bracketed by the blessings of ברוך שאמר and ישתבח, are also שירה. Before a Jew can pray for his needs he must sing praise to Gd. כל הללוי-ה שירו לד' שיר חדש. The word הללוי-ה refers to שירה. The importance of saying שירה every day before one prays for his personal needs was underscored by the inclusion of the last chapters of Psalms in the פסוקי דזמרה, each of which concludes with הללוי-ה.

There are two categories of שירה. The first is recited on a supernatural miracle and deliverance from impending calamity. When a miracle occurs that transcends nature we say that Gd has broken the laws of nature to create the miracle. Kabbalistic masters of the middle ages say when Gd performs a supernatural miracle, the משדד is השגחה, breaks, the laws of nature. The Ibn Ezra says that the word ש-ד-י and the word שודד have the same root, for sometimes Gd acts as a thief who robs the laws of nature to fulfill His will. שירה recited over supernatural events is called הלל, or as we generally refer to it, הלל. Since the Exodus from Egypt was a supernatural process of open miracles, Chazal established that the associated שירה of הלל המצרי be recited over supernatural miracles, נסים שלא בדרך הטבע, whenever they occur.

The שירה for supernatural miracles can be recited by great and simple people alike. שירת אז ישיר was recited by Moshe and the Jewish People, from the greatest to the simplest. The Zohar accepted the opinion of Rabbi Nehemiah, that בני ישראל repeated the entire שירה after Moses, they did not limit themselves to reciting the refrain of אז ישיר, as the divine countenance settled on all of them. As Chazal say, a maid witnessed miracles and revelations at the Reed Sea that Ezekiel did not see; they all saw the miracles and sang שירה to Gd.

שירה is also recited over the constant wonders of nature. This שירה is not said over the breaking of the laws of nature, but rather in recognition of their consistency and continuity. While הלל המצרי praises Gd for breaking the norms of nature, King David devoted much of Psalms to

praise and celebrate Gd as the protector and maintainer of nature, for example, ברכי נפשי ד' אלקי גדלת מאד. Chazal referred to this type of praise as הלל דפסוקי דזמרה, starting with תהלה לדוד and concluding with כל הנשמה תהלל י-ה.

Those familiar with the tone and tenor of Chazal (the Rav explained that this is a different level than simply knowing Talmud, one must strive to understand and appreciate the voice and intent behind statements of Chazal) particularly the Rambam, understand that Chazal preferred הלל daily over הלל המצרי. The Talmud (Shabbos 118b) says that one who recites הלל daily is a blasphemer. The Talmud notes that this contradicts a statement by Rabbi Yosi, “my portion should be with those that complete הלל daily”. The Talmud answers that it is laudable to recite הלל daily, but not הלל המצרי. (The Rav raised the problem faced by those who recite all of Psalms daily, which includes הלל המצרי, should they skip it or recite it.) Man’s religious experience ought not be dependent on witnessing miracles and supernatural events. He should appreciate Gd more simply, by appreciating the consistency of nature. Gd’s greatness is more profound when observing the organic world and nature and appreciating the consistency of the mathematical formulae that explain it. The ten plagues visited on the Egyptians, the splitting of the sea and drowning 600 Egyptian chariots pale in comparison.

Chazal understood that Gd’s intention at creation was for nature to function without interference. If Gd is compelled, כביכול, to resort to a supernatural act, it is due to a deficiency on the part of the beneficiary of that act who sank so low that he no longer can be saved by natural means. Chazal explain the verse וארד להצילו as a ירידה, degradation, כביכול, for Gd because He had to break the laws of nature in order to rescue the Jews. The Midrash compares the act of Gd descending to Egypt and rescuing the Jews through miracles to a תרומה whose כהן was placed in a cemetery and the only way for the כהן to retrieve it is to defile himself by entering the cemetery.

Gd intended to rendezvous with man through nature. One may never find Gd if he seeks Him through supernatural events. A deficiency of modern man is that he conflates religious commitment with miracles and cannot, or will not, see Gd in everyday existence. That is why Chazal looked askance at those who recite הלל המצרי daily. For one who conditions his praise of Gd and connection to Him on supernatural events is incapable of appreciating Gd’s all-encompassing natural greatness. Therefore Chazal preferred and stressed daily recitation of הלל דפסוקי דזמרה to appreciate Gd’s greatness through nature.

Who was greater Moses or Abraham? On the one hand, Moses, the greatest of all prophets was greater. Indeed, Rambam codifies Moses as the greatest prophet in his 13 principles. On the other hand, we must say that Abraham was greater as he introduced Gd to the world. After complaining about his mission when Pharaoh spurned his demand to release the Jews at their initial encounter, Gd rebuked Moses by comparing his response to those of the Patriarchs. Rashi quotes the Midrash that Gd recalled His relationship with the Patriarchs who did not question His actions or directions, חבל על דאבדין ולא משתכחי. Judaism views the special connection between Gd, Elokim, and the three patriarchs, אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק אלקי יעקב, as a fundamental principle in Judaism. Even though Moses was the greatest of men, בחר מין אנושי, we do not find

the phrase **אלקי משה**. Why not? One can infer from the Rambam that **אלקי אברהם** means the possessive form, the God of Abraham. The possessive form implies a concept of ownership. **אלקי אברהם** means the God that belongs to Abraham. Abraham was the owner and Gd, **כביכול**, was Abraham's possession. Abraham claimed Gd, hence He was called **אלקי אברהם**.

How does one make a **קנין**, claim ownership, of Gd? Apparently it can be done by following the formula in the Mishna in **אלו מציאות** for claiming ownerless property, **הפקר**. Abraham claimed Gd because he found Him and He was ownerless, unclaimed, unknown. Gd was like an object that lacked a sign of ownership, **סימן**, hence Abraham was able to claim Him. There is one difference: one does not set out to seek abandoned objects. If an individual happens to come across an abandoned object he can claim it. When it comes to Gd, one claims ownership of Gd by finding Him, but first he must seek Gd as a prerequisite to claim Him. Abraham did not find Gd by chance. Rather, he sought Gd for many years until he found and claimed Him.

Abraham was 75 years old when Gd spoke with him the first time and tells him to leave Charan, as recorded in the Torah. Abraham was either 3 or 43 (as Rambam says) years old when he recognized that Gd controls the world. Many years passed without any contact from Him. All this time Abraham was spreading word of a true Gd, creator of heaven and earth. People surely asked and mocked Abraham, "Have you spoken with your God? Have you had any contact with Him? Abraham would not be deterred from his mission, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable the situation was. He forged ahead, committed to his mission. As a result of the great effort he expended, Gd became Abraham's. **בצר לך ומצאוך**, if one seeks Gd in a technology driven generation that mocks him and Gd or through the tragedy and pain of a Holocaust, and despite all the questions and doubts that trouble him, eventually he will find Him. However there is a caveat. One cannot seek Gd with his eyes alone. He must put his entire heart and soul into the search, **כי תדרשנו בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך**.

Abraham did not find Gd through **הלל המצרי**. He never witnessed the splitting of the sea, **הים ראה**. He never saw the mountains trembling, **ההרים תרקדו כאילים**. Indeed, the stories of the 3 patriarchs do not specify extreme supernatural events. There were no open or revealed miracles when Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt. Abraham sought God and found him through nature, through **בצר לך**. At that point God became his, **אלקי אברהם**.

In contrast to Abraham, Moses did not seek Gd. He had no questions or problems, apparently content to shepherd his father in law's sheep. Jethro's concerns were his concerns; nothing else bothered him. Suddenly he came across the burning bush and encountered Gd. Moses did not experience **בצר לך** nor was there any **ובקשתם משם** or **ונפש** that precipitated their initial encounter. Rather, it was Gd who found Moses and told him to approach. It was clear from the ensuing story that Moses wanted to decline his mission. In this incident, Gd found Moses instead of Moses finding Gd. Moses became the property, or **קנין**, of Gd. That is why Moses is called servant of Gd, **עבד ד'**. What is the difference between **אלקי אברהם** and **עבד ד'**? Gd belonged to Abraham while Moses belonged to Gd. From their first encounter, Moses saw Gd through **הלל המצרי**, through **הים ראה** וינס, through supernatural events.

Did Moses, the greatest human being, ever seek Gd? Only later, after destroying the first set of tablets, לוחות הראשונות, did Moses realize that the true way to find Gd is to seek Him, to search for Him. Moses asks Gd to show him His glory, the divine presence, the שכינה. Moses said that he already saw Gd at Sinai though הלל המצרי. When he receives the second tablets, לוחות שניות, Moses says now he wants to seek Gd the same way Abraham did, through בצר לך. Not through the supernatural event of the bush that burns but is not consumed, but through nature, the way Gd intended. The giving of the לוחות הראשונות was marked by fire, lightning and thunder, a supernatural display that awed and frightened all who beheld it. However, Gd did not reveal Himself to Moses at לוחות שניות through fire, but through a cloud, through nature. The first tablets were defined by הלל המצרי, the second by הלל דפסוקי דזמרה.

With לוחות שניות, Gd informed Moses that He will be revealed through the long extended periods of difficulty, suffering, exile, holocaust and disaster, through בצר לך. However, Gd promised Moses that if he perseveres and truly seeks Gd, ultimately he will find Him and become the greatest prophet, eclipsing even Abraham. However, Moses would never attain the ownership achieved by the patriarchs, the phrase אלקי משה could no longer be applied to him. He will always be referred to as עבד ד' since his initiation to his role was the result of Gd seeking Moses and not the reverse. Where Abraham began his mission through הלל דפסוקי דזמרה, Moses began his through הלל המצרי.

This is a characteristic of Judaism in general. It is difficult to distill Judaism into succinct principles, sound bites if you will, that focus on the dramatic. Even the Rambam, left himself open to criticism from Gedolay Yisrael regarding his 13 principles of faith. Judaism always preferred הלל דפסוקי דזמרה over הלל המצרי. It takes time and effort to achieve a relationship with Gd. (The Rav remarked (apparently in jest) that he appreciated Shamai's approach to the lout who requested Shamai teach him all of Torah "on one foot", where Shamai threw him down and walked away. Adopting Shamai's approach would have underscored the importance of all 613 Mitzvahs, and perhaps blunted the establishment of reform movements within Judaism.)

Other nations approach Gd much more readily than the Jewish Nation. Judaism has many demands and is replete with paradoxes like no other religion. The non-Jew who wants to understand the beauty of religious life needs only to participate in various public religious acts to come close to God. His personal life remains unchanged and off limits to his religion. He can enjoy life to his fullest desires. These religions do not require great daily sacrifices from their adherents to rendezvous with God in their everyday private lives. Their deity is approachable with minimal effort.

Judaism emphasizes בצר לך ומצאוך as the path to rendezvous with Gd. The Jew is required to observe positive commandments and restrictions in his personal life. שמירת המצוות is uniquely Jewish. It means self-sacrifice and dedication under optimal conditions in our own homeland. The degree of difficulty increases significantly when we are in exile in a foreign land. The Midrash asks on the verse גלתה יהודה מעוני ומרוב עבודה, were the Jews the only nation to be exiled? Why is it such a continuous tragedy for the Jews? Chazal answer that the nations of the world who are exiled eat the local food and enjoy the local life style and amenities. They are not

really in exile. But for Jews who do not eat the local bread or drink local wine, it is most definitely exile. Take for example an American Jew who wants to observe the Sabbath and wants to participate in American business and culture. He must close his business on the Sabbath, forfeiting the revenue of perhaps the best business day of the week. A Jew who attends a secular university must work around the problems of examinations administered on the Sabbath. A Jew who lives a great distance from a synagogue may have a strong desire to attend services, even though the only way he can is to drive on the Sabbath. The sacrifice of foregoing the easy path in business, education or even staying home and not attending services on the Sabbath in order to observe the Sabbath properly is also a manifestation of בצר לך ומצאוך.

Perhaps the greatest example of בצר לך ומצאוך is our devotion to Jewish Education. Our notion of a Yeshiva or day school is very different from that of the Catholic school system. Their religious schools follow essentially the same curriculum as the public schools. The difference is more an issue of environment and milieu. A Jewish day school on the other hand, requires the students to learn an entirely different language and vocabulary. They must study additional subjects like Chumash, Rashi and ultimately the most complicated and difficult discipline to master, Talmud. The abstract thought processes of Talmud Study are uniquely difficult, exact and require extraordinary concentration. We have always been exoteric regarding the study of Talmud. Participation by parents and children in Jewish Education, with its double schedule devoted to Talmud and secular studies, and homework for both, is the best example of בצר לך ומצאוך.

Elkana, Chana's husband, straddled 2 hills, רמתים צופים. There was a huge canyon between them, yet he did not vacate either for fear that he would fall into the abyss between them. Instead he built a bridge between them. One who wants to understand Talmud must also understand math and physics etc. Many have said it is impossible to live simultaneously on the two hills of Elkana, on a רמתים צופים. Many tried but fell into the abyss. We push our children to succeed in both disciplines, to appreciate and absorb the full beauty and depth of the Talmud, and simultaneously to succeed in the secular world. There is no other way, we can't go back to the days when students were secluded from everything but Torah studies. If we want to ensure that Judaism does not become relegated to a sect, (where morality, ethics and personal life are circumscribed and blind obedience is required), and it does not become closed into the 4 cubits of בטלנות, we have to figure out how to live in רמתים צופים. This is the continuation of Moses' mission at the second קבלת התורה, the mission of בצר לך ומצאוך ובקשתם משם, to work hard to appreciate both Torah and the nature Gd created for us to observe and enjoy.

Rambam says that the foundation of Judaism is to pursue knowledge of Gd, מצוה לידע. Chovas HaLevavos, who preceded the Rambam, said Judaism is based on the concept of הכרת הטוב, expressing thanks to Gd for all He has done for us. To be a Jew is to be a thankful person. Rabbeinu Bachya says that expressing thankfulness to Gd is the climax of this idea. However, it must begin with expressing thanks between man and his fellow man, להכיר הטוב בין אדם לחברו. If one is incapable of expressing thanks to another person, he will inevitably be incapable of expressing thanks to Gd. And without the ability to express thanks to Gd, it is impossible to experience a religious way of life.

פרשת בשלה tells us that Moses took the remains of Joseph with him. Didn't Moses have anything more important to do on the night of redemption than to search for the remains of a person who died hundreds of years before? After all, Moses was a busy man, why didn't he ask others to search for the remains? Also, Moses told Pharaoh that they were going on a three day journey to celebrate with Gd. Taking Joseph's remains with them indicated that they were leaving permanently. So why did he insist on rocking the boat to take Joseph's remains and confirm Pharaoh's suspicion that they had no intention to return? Because Moses was compelled by הכרת הטוב for all Joseph did for the Jewish people. Joseph always knew that the future of Jews and Judaism was in ארץ ישראל and not in Egypt. Joseph showed them how to survive as Jews in exile, to live as a committed Jew under the most difficult of situations of בצר לך ומצאוך. Moses wanted to express הכרת הטוב to Joseph on his own. He insisted on taking personal responsibility for fulfilling Joseph's request to take his remains with them when they are ultimately redeemed.

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