

Rashi quotes Unkelos' explanation of the verse *אֲשִׁירָה לַשֵּׁם כִּי גָאֵה גָאֵה* (Exodus 15:1) as "I will sing to G-d because (or since) he is above all". Rashi adds another interpretation of this verse, that in contradistinction to a flawed, limited and highly undeserving mortal king who is lionized by his subjects, G-d truly deserves infinite praise. However human frailty prevents us from offering it.

Rashi's second interpretation implies Moses emphasized that despite all the openly visible and hidden miracles G-d performed for them, the Jewish People offered limited praise to G-d because they lacked the ability to adequately express their admiration and gratitude to Him. Rashi interprets the word *כִּי* as "even though", or "despite" (similar to the use of *כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא*, G-d did not lead the Jewish People through the land of the Philistines **even though** it was closer). Our verse is saying "I will sing to G-d **even though** He is exalted above all and I can't possibly express all His praises adequately. The Gemara (Megila 25a, Brachot 33b) says, based on the verse 'לך השם דומיה תהלה', To You (G-d) silence is praise', man is enjoined from composing or offering his own praise to G-d. Had the Rabbis of the Great Assembly not incorporated the words *הקל הגדול הגבור והנורא* into our daily supplication, we would not have permission to utter even those words of praise to G-d. Their license to incorporate that phrase derived from Moses' recorded use of it to praise G-d (Deuteronomy 10:17). If human limitations restrict our ability to offer verbal praise to G-d, what is the fundamental source of permission (*מתיר*) for man to pray? Indeed, what gave Moses' the permission to offer the very phrase *הקל הגדול הגבור והנורא* that we quote in our supplication?

There are several sources for the *שירה* of *מתיר*, each derived from *שירת הים* sung by Moses and the people. The first explanation is based on Maimonides (see Hilchot Brachot 1:3.). Man has an instinctive need to give thanks and recognition to someone who performs an act of kindness on his behalf. When man seeks to praise G-d for the favors He performs for him, his natural urge is transformed into praising G-d for all the acts of kindness He performs for man on a regular basis. However because of his limitations, the best he can do is offer partial praise of G-d where full and complete praise is required. At that moment on the banks of the Sea of Reeds, after seeing their Egyptian tormentors lying dead on the shore of the Sea of Reeds and realizing that they would no longer threaten them, Moses and the Jewish People were overwhelmed with the need to sing praise to G-d in recognition of the many miracles and acts of kindness He performed for them. This is similar to how Joseph was unable to control his emotions when he revealed himself to his brothers. This overwhelming need to thank G-d is also the *מתיר* for *שירה* and regular prayer. Man is distinguished from the animal kingdom by his ability and need to pray. Even though he recognizes that his limitations a priori

render his prayers inadequate (כי גאה גאה), he must instinctively offer them anyway (עזי וזמרת י-ה).

The second suggestion for the מתיר for שירה is based on how Moses knew it was permissible to praise G-d at the Sea of Reeds. שירת הים required a precedent and Moses relied on a tradition dating back to our patriarch Abraham, teaching us that the Jewish Nation prays to G-d in times of crisis and praises Him in times of joy. The Gemara (Brachos 26b) says that our patriarchs established the order of our daily prayers. The intention of the Gemara is not merely to present a history lesson. Rather, it is to show us that when the patriarchs established the morning, afternoon and evening prayers, they provided the precedent for us to pray accordingly. Indeed, Moses emphasized his reliance on the precedent of the patriarchs in the phrase אלקי אבי וארוממנהו, as my fore-fathers before me praised G-d, so shall I.

Rambam (Hilchot Tfilah 9:7, Moreh Nevuchim 1:59) provides a third possibility as to the מתיר for שירה. The Gemara (Megila 25a) says praise for G-d may be voiced only by one capable of reciting all His praises, מי ימלל גבורות השם ישמיע כל תהלתו (Psalms 106:2). This of course is impossible for mortals. Yet the prophets often included additional praises of G-d in the revelations and prophecies they transmitted to the people. These revelations were intended to teach us G-d's ways so we may emulate them. Permission to praise G-d is granted to us because that very praise inherently describes מדות השם, G-d's characteristics, and provides us with the blueprint of how to act in order to emulate G-d's ways. The Gemara (Shabbat 133b) derives the obligation to emulate G-d's ways from the verse זה קלי ואנוהו, This is My G-d and I will glorify Him. That verse paraphrases the obligation of והלכת בדרכיו. The word ואנוהו is an acronym for אני והוא (I and He). As G-d performs acts of kindness, so should I. When we recite praise to G-d, we reiterate and reinforce our obligation to emulate G-d's ways that we are praising Him for, just as Moses and the Jewish People did generations ago at the Sea of Reeds. The מתיר for שירה is that the praise itself defines how to fulfill the Mitzvah of והלכת בדרכיו.

This summary is copyright 2022 by Rabbi Josh Rapps. Permission to distribute this summary for individual use, with this notice, is granted. Distribution through electronic or printed media without the author's permission is prohibited.