
CLIMBING A STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

A NEW TAKE ON MUSIC, SONG, AND JUDAISM

For many of us, listening to music is a transforming, empowering, spiritually uplifting experience. Something about Pachelbel's Cannon in D major, whether heard in a live orchestral performance or as quiet, ambient music in a restaurant, or even in our own living room, so enchants us. What is it that lifts us up? What is the secret to the powerful impact of music?

Music strikes a deep chord within our psyche and has the well-recognized power to stir our emotions. In movies and theater, the musical score brings alive the production, communicates the mood of the scene, and fosters ethereal sentiments in the viewer. Music even influences the world political scene, such as the rock tunes of the 60's that fueled the anti-Vietnam War movement. The Torah is keenly aware of the emotive power of music. *Shirah*, song, is mentioned many times in the Torah as an expression of gratitude to God – usually for a miraculous personal or national salvation. The Torah notes how music was employed to help create a feeling of joy, allow for a connection with God, and even stave off depression. Music and song play an important role in Jewish spirituality and prayer.

This class explores the Jewish perspective on music in general and the role and importance of Jewish song and music in particular. In the process we will seek to answer the following questions:

- ☞ Why is music such a powerful medium?
- ☞ Does Jewish literature make mention of the role of music?
- ☞ Does music play any role in the Jewish tradition?
- ☞ Why has the way we listen to music changed since the Second Temple's destruction in 70 CE?
- ☞ How will the world experience a new dimension of music with the advent of the Messianic Era?

CLASS OUTLINE:

- Section I: **The Powers of Music**
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 Part A. The All-Time “Top Ten”
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SECTION I. THE POWERS OF MUSIC

We begin by exploring what Judaism sees as the value of music in general. Music involves a profound and subtle wisdom. This wisdom was recognized by early Jewish scholars as a refined and elevated element of the physical world, and as a phenomenon that can rouse our emotions and bring our spirits to a high. Vocal song was first expressed by Adam (the first man) singing a song praising the Sabbath (Psalm 92). Instrumental music was invented by Adam's seventh generation descendent, Tuval.

PART A. WISDOM

Judaism sees music as a high form of wisdom.

1. **Bereishit (Genesis) 4:21 with the commentaries of Radak and Ibn Ezra – The Torah makes note of the inventor of musical instruments because it considers music a high form of wisdom.**

Yavel's brother's name was Yuval. He was the ancestor of all who play the harp and flute.

Radak: Yuval was the originator of the art of music.

Ibn Ezra: The harp and the flute represent musical instruments. [Music] is a great wisdom.

ושם אחיו יובל הוא היה אבי כל תפש כנור ועוגב:

רד"ק: הוא היה הראשון בחכמות הנגון.

אבן עזרא: כנור ועוגב: מיני כלי נגינות, והיא חכמה גדולה:

The Ramban (Nachmanides – among the leading medieval Jewish scholars) recognized music as the most subtle element of the physical world.

2. **Ramban, Shaar HaGemul – Music is the least physical element in the world.**

The idea of the harp and other musical instruments in the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple) hints at the intellectual discernment seated in the soul; there is nothing in the physical world more subtle and refined than music.

ענין הכנור וכלי הזמר במקדש רמז להשגת המחשבה שהיא נתלית ברוח, ואין בגשמיות דק כמוסיקא.

3. **Rav Yisrael of Shklov in the name of his mentor, the Vilna Gaon (Introduction to Pe'at Hashulchan) (Translated by Rabbi Elysha Sandler in Through Music and Song, pg. 83) – The wisdom of music is the key to incredible depths.**

[The Vilna Gaon] praised the wisdom of music greatly. He used to say then that most explanations of the Torah, secrets of the songs of the Levi'im, and secrets of the Tikkunei Zohar, cannot be comprehended without it...One can revive the dead with its secrets, which are concealed in the Torah. He used to say that numerous songs and numerous rhythms were brought down from Har Sinai by Moshe Rabeinu. The other songs are mere hybrids.

חכמת מוסיקה, שיבחה הרבה. הוא היה אומר אז, כי רוב טעמי תורה, וסודות שירי הלויים וסודות תיקוני הזוהר, אי אפשר לידע בלעדה ... ויכולים להחיות מתים בסודותיה הגנוזים בתורה. הוא אמר, כמה גנונים וכמה מידות הביא משה רבנו מהר סיני והשאר מורכבים.

Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon (in his Matnat Chaim) explains that a tune has the power to bring out the subtlety and profound meaning of everyday words. Hearing, he points out, is a metaphor for understanding (“I hear” can mean “I understand”). So, too, a tune or musical composition can bring a person to a clearer understanding and deeper appreciation of wisdom.

PART B. SPIRITUALITY

The reason music is able to bring us to a greater depth of understanding is that it is hardwired into our souls.

There is an inner connection between music and the spirit. When language aspires to the transcendent and the soul longs to break free of the gravitational pull of the earth, it modulates into song. Music, said Arnold Bennett, is “a language which the soul alone understands but which the soul can never translate.” It is, in Richter’s words, “the poetry of the air.” Tolstoy called it “the shorthand of emotion.” Goethe said, “Religious worship cannot do without music. It is one of the foremost means to work upon man with an effect of marvel.” Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Music, Language of the Soul,” from www.aish.com)

Music is a language of the soul. So much so, in fact, that Jewish prayer often mentions the singing of the angels in heaven. Our souls, whose origin is indeed heaven, have a subtle appreciation for the spiritual nature of music.

1. **Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin (citing Ma’avar Yabok), Talelei Orot, Tefillah Anthology, Vol. III, pp. 59-60 – When we hear music, our souls recall their home in the world of spirit.**

The human soul takes pleasure in song and music because before coming to earth it regularly heard the beautiful songs and

הנשמה נהנית מהנגון לפי שהיא רגילה בניגונים בשיר של מלאכי השרת ושיר הגלגלים ובהיותה בגוף ושומעת נגון נהנית כמו שהיתה רגילה

hymns of the ministering angels in heaven. Therefore, even confined to a physical body, when a soul hears music, it takes pleasure, as it did on a regular basis when it was still attached to its source. From its enjoyment of music it becomes capable of having the spirit of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) rest upon it just as when it resided in heaven (see Part D, Source 4).

בהיותה דבוקה ביסודה. ומרוב הערבות ראויה לשרות עליה רוח אלוקים כפי הנהגתה ויסודה הראשון.

The concept of music being found primarily in heaven resonates with the idea mentioned above (in the name of the Vilna Gaon), that the highest form of music was brought down to the world from Sinai.

Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, the author of one of the most famous of Jewish songs - *Lecha Dodi*, which is sung on Friday night - writes about the spiritual power of music, in his commentary to Megillat Esther.

2. Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, Manot HaLevi 1:8 - Music is a language of the soul.

The human soul enjoys music because it regularly heard it while in heaven. We know this from the straightforward and true meaning of Biblical verses which describe how ministering angels open their mouths in blessing, praise and glorification...in a clear expression...making heard the sound of their wings.

Music can cause people to become so enraptured that they feel they have left their bodies. They lose track of where they are. To some, sweet music is so soothing that it puts them to sleep. The soul simply leaves the body it was guarding and it becomes as still as a corpse, fast asleep.

For example, many infants cannot sleep at all unless they hear a lullaby. Having left Heaven only recently, the souls of infants still need sweet music and cannot find rest without it. And similarly an ill person, sapped of physical strength, is spiritually boosted through music.

ולמה שהיו הניגון והמושי"קה דבר יערב לנפש לסבת היותה מורגלת בשמע זה בהיותה במרו' כנודע למי שלא יכחיש פשוטן של מקראות ואמתתן ומלאכי מרום פותחים את פיהם ממברכין משבחין מפארין וכו' בשפה ברורה וכו' ואשמע את קול כנפיהן וגו'.

ויש אנשים יערב עליהם כ"כ עד אשר יתבטלו חושיהם לבל ידעו איפה הם ויש מהם תקפוץ עליהם שינה כי תתבודד הנפש לשמוע אל הרנה עד שתנוח הגוף כפגר מת כי רועה היא אותו וכשתפרד מהשגיא בו יהיה כלא היה וישן וירדם

כמו בקטנים יונקי שדים כי לא ישנו אם לא ישמעו את קול הרנה וכשומעם יניחו על משכבותם וערבה שנתם להיות צלצול הקול והנועם עדיין נקבעת בנפשם למיעוט זמן הפרדם ממנו וכן יקרה לחולים כי בהחלש הכחות החומריים ינשאו הנפשיים לעומתה ...

Music touches the soul. This spiritual power of music is employed in our daily prayers. The morning prayer service begins with *P'sukei D'Zimra*, verses of song (though there is no specific tradition of which melody they are sung).

Kabbalists actually point out that the word for song, *zimra*, is etymologically similar to the word *zomer*, meaning to prune. By singing, we prune off any spiritual impurities in preparation to pray to God.

3. **Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, Mishnah Berurah 54:3:5 – Song prepares the way for our prayers to rise to Heaven.**

It is written in the name of Mateh Moshe that *kliptot* (spiritual forces of negativity) obstruct prayers from ascending (to God), but by way of *P'sukei D'Zimra* we cut them loose.

כתב בשם מטה משה שהקליפות מבטלים
לעלות התפלה וע"י פסוקי דזמרה מכריתים
אותם.

On a simpler level, we can understand that the function of song in the context of prayer is to spiritually elevate a person, in preparation for the main part of the prayer. The Midrash teaches that vocal song was first expressed by Adam HaRishon in praising Shabbat (see below Section II, Part B, Source 3.).

PART C. STIRRING THE EMOTIONS

Rabbi Y.Y. Rubinstein was invited annually to speak at the famed Cheltenham School of Music in England. On these visits he would be honored with a performance by one of their virtuoso students. They usually picked either a Jewish theme or a Scottish one (Rabbi Rubinstein is both). One year, a young boy played a violin solo for him. The Rabbi, an aficionado of music, had never heard the piece before – but he was moved. At the end of the recital he found himself a ball of emotions, tears welling up in his eyes. He applauded, thanked the young boy, and then asked his hosts to reveal the name of this most moving piece of music that he had not recognized. The song, they told him, was a composition by the American composer John Williams called, “Theme from Schindler’s List.”

Rabbi Rubinstein, unaware of the musical piece’s connection to the famed hero who saved Jews from the Holocaust, was nonetheless emotionally aroused. The Torah recognizes the influence of music and its ability to strike a chord within the psyche and stir the emotions. With this recognition, the Torah mandates employing music as a means to fend off feelings of depression and to create joy, in order to connect with God.

Sadness can block our connection to spirituality. We see this principle at work in the lives of some of our greatest ancestors. For instance, Yaakov (Jacob) lost his ability to connect through prophecy when he thought that his beloved son Yosef (Joseph) had been killed. His sadness blocked his spiritual connection.

1. **Bereishit 45:27 and Avot DeRabbi Natan 30 – Yaakov lost his Divine Inspiration throughout the years of mourning over the presumed loss of Yosef. The following source records what happened when Yaakov heard that Yosef was, in fact, alive.**

...and the spirit of their father Jacob was revived.

Avot DeRabbi Natan

The Divine Inspiration that had departed from him rested upon him again at that moment.

ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם:

אבות דרבי נתן

רוח הקודש שנסתלקה ממנו שרתה עליו באותה שעה

But music can restore the soul.

2. **Shmuel (Samuel) I 16:14-23 – David cheered up King Shaul (Saul) with his music.**

And the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord frightened him. And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit of God is frightening you. Our master, allow your servants to say before you, they shall seek a man who knows how to play the harp. And it will be that when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play with his hand, and it will be good for you."

And Saul said to his servants, "Provide me now with a man who plays well, and you shall bring him to me." And one of the young men answered and said, "Behold, I saw a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who knows how to play, a mighty man of valor, and a warrior, and prudent in affairs, and a handsome man, and the Lord is with him." And Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and he said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep." And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread, and an earthenware jug of wine, and a kid; and he sent them with David his son, to Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him, and he loved him very much, and he was his weapon bearer.

And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David stand before me now, for he has found

ורוח יקוק סרה מעם שאול ובעתתו רוח רעה מאת יקוק:

ויאמרו עבדי שאול אליו הנה נא רוח אלהים רעה מבעתך:

יאמר נא אדננו עבדיך לפניך יבקשו איש ידע מנגן בכנור והיה בהיות עליך רוח אלהים רעה ונגן בידו וטוב לך:

ויאמר שאול אל עבדיו ראו נא לי איש מיטיב לנגן והביאותם אלי: ויען אחד מהנערים ויאמר הנה ראיתי בן לישי בית הלחמי ידע נגן וגבור חיל ואיש מלחמה ונבון דבר ואיש תאר ויקוק עמו: וישלח שאול מלאכים אל ישי ויאמר שלחה אלי את דוד בנך אשר בצאן: ויקח ישי חמור לחם ונאד יין וגדי עזים אחד וישלח ביד דוד בנו אל שאול: ויבא דוד אל שאול ויעמד לפניו ויאהבהו מאד ויהי לו נשא כלים:

וישלח שאול אל ישי לאמר יעמד נא דוד לפני כי מצא חן בעיני: והיה בהיות רוח אלהים אל שאול

favor in my eyes.” And it was that whenever the spirit of God was upon Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand, and Saul was relieved, and it was good for him, and the evil spirit departed from him.

ולקח דוד את הכנור ונגן בידו ורוח לשאול וטוב לו וסרה מעליו רוח הרעה:

The Rambam (Maimonides) understands this to be general advice.

3. **Rambam, Shemoneh Perakim 5 – Music eradicates depression.**

Also, one who is overtaken by depression can dispel it by listening to songs with various types of music.

וכן, מי שהתעוררה עליו מרה שחורה, יסירה בשמיעת הניגונים במיני זמר.

It is interesting to note the tradition that Jacob, who lost his powers of prophecy due to his sadness, regained them when his granddaughter Serach bat Asher sang to him the news that his son was still alive, while playing a harp (see Midrash HaGadol, Bereishit 45:26).

PART D. PROPHECY

Depression blocks spiritual awareness. Prophecy, the ultimate state of being attached to God, was only possible to achieve while in a state of joy.

The ultimate experience of human joy was to be found in the Beit HaMikdash during Sukkot, when the Sages would sing and dance all night with lit torches, to the accompaniment of music played by the Levites.

1. **Mishnah, Sukkah 5:1 – The joy experienced in the Temple on Sukkot was incomparable.**

Whoever did not witness the *Simchat Beit HaSho'evah* [the Water Drawing Ceremony] never experienced true joy.

כָּל מִי שֶׁלֹּא רָאָה שְׂמֵחַת בֵּית הַשּׂוֹאֵבָה, לֹא רָאָה שְׂמֵחָה מִיָּמָיו:

The singing and dancing of the Simchat Beit HaSho'evah had tremendous impact.

2. **Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Sukkah 22b – One must be in a state of joy to receive prophecy.**

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Why is [the celebration in the Temple during Sukkot] called ‘The House of Drawing

א”ר יהושע בן לוי למה נקרא שמה בית שואבה שמשם שואבים רוח הקודש... אמר רבי יונה, יונה בן אמיתי מעולי רגלים היה ונכנס לשמחת

Forth'? Because from there is drawn Divine Inspiration"...Rabbi Yonah said, "[The prophet] Yonah ben Amitai [Jonah] went to Jerusalem for the festival, where he attended the joyous Water Drawing Ceremony [at Sukkot]. Divine Inspiration rested upon him. This teaches us that Divine Inspiration only rests on someone whose heart is happy."

בית השואבה ושרת עליו רוח הקודש, ללמדך
שאין רוח הקדש שורה אלא על לב שמח.

The specific use of music to attain the state of mind and heart to receive prophecy is mentioned several times in the Torah.

3. **Divrei HaYamim (Chronicles) I 25:1 – The prophets used musical instruments to achieve prophecy.**

Then David and the generals of the army separated for the service of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Yedutun, who prophesied with harps, with lyres, and with cymbals...

ויבדל דויד ושרי הצבא לעבדה לבני אסף והימן
וידותון הנביאים [הנבאים ק'] בכנרות בנבלים
ובמצלתים...

4. **Melachim (Kings) II 3:15 with commentary of Radak – The prophet Elisha used music to raise his spirits and regain his prophetic powers.**

[The prophet Elisha said] "...And now fetch me a musician." And it was that when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him.

Radak

From the day his mentor Elijah departed, the spirit of prophecy did not rest upon him, for he was in mourning, and Divine Inspiration only rests upon a person in a state of happiness. Others say that because of his anger toward the king of Israel he was sad, as they say, "How do we know that any prophet that gets angry loses his prophetic ability? From Elisha." Therefore, in order to achieve the joy necessary for prophecy, he said, "Fetch me a musician."

ועתה קחו לי מנגן והיה כנגן המנגן ותהי עליו יד
ה':

רד"ק

אמרו כי מיום שנסתלק אליהו רבו לא שרתה
עליו רוח נבואה עדיין כי אבל היה ורוח הקדש
אינה שורה אלא מתוך שמחה וי"א מפני הכעס
שכעס על מלך ישראל היה עצב ואמרו כל
הכועס אם נביא נבואתו מסתלקת ממנו מנא לן
מאלישע ולשמחתו אמר קחו לי מנגן:

When the Temple was destroyed due to our lowered spirituality, we lost the power of prophecy, and we cannot expect music to restore us to that level. Nonetheless, music is certainly a means to uplift our mood. (See the Morasha shiur on Prophecy I on what it requires to become a prophet and experience prophecy.)

PART E. CONNECTING WITH GOD

Judaism maintains that our purpose in this world is to build a relationship with God. For that connection to grow, we need to develop an awareness of God and consciously work on establishing a relationship with Him. Judaism's method for achieving this awareness of God and bringing Him into our lives is through Torah study and its mitzvot. By applying the range of our faculties to spiritual growth, through studying Torah, fulfilling God's commandments, praying and expressing our devotion to God, we achieve closeness to Him.

1. **Rabbi Abraham Besdin, Reflections of the Rav, pg. 71 – We use the range of our faculties to build a relationship with God.**

There are four media through which man reaches out to God, transcending his finiteness and communicating with Infinity. These are the intellectual, *limmud* (Torah study); the volitional, *shemirat hamitzvot* (observance of the Torah commandments); *tefillah* (prayer); and the emotional, *ahavat Hashem* (love of God).

In addition, song and music can also inspire us to connect with God.

Rabbi Elysha Sandler points out that if we examine the *Nishmat* prayer that we recite every Shabbat and Yom Tov morning, as well as at the Pesach Seder, we will see that for the many, music is a powerful and necessary tool to draw close to God.

2. **Nishmat – The multitudes need music.**

By the mouths of the upright – may You be praised,

And by the words of the righteous – may You be blessed,

And by the tongue of the pious – may You be exalted,

And amid the holy – may You be sanctified,

And in the assemblies of the myriads of Your people, the House of Yisrael – **with joyous song**, may Your name be glorified, our King, in every generation.

בפי ישרים - תתהלל,

ובדברי צדיקים - תתברך,

ובלשון חסידים - תתרומם,

ובקרב קדושים - תתקדש,

ובמקהלות רבבות עמך בית ישראל - **ברינה**
יתפאר שמך מלכינו בכל דור ודור.

3. **Rabbi Elysha Sandler, Through Music And Song, pg. 26 – The “masses” need music.**

The first four groups of extraordinary individuals praise, bless, exalt, and sanctify Hashem without the need to resort to song. The masses, on the other hand, glorify Hashem's Name specifically through song.

Rabbi Sandler (pg. 27) quotes two Chassidic masters who elaborate on this idea, referring to a Chamber of Music – a spiritual “chamber” through which a person is able to connect with God.

4. **Imrei Kadosh 67, Rabbi Uri of Strelisk – The Chamber of Music.**

If a person is unable to draw himself close to the Holy One, blessed is He, then through the Chamber of Music, it is possible for him to draw close.

ואיש אשר אינו יכול לקרב עצמו להקדוש ברוך הוא, אז על ידי היכל הניגון, אפשר לו לקרב עצמו.

5. **Ahavat Haboreh, Rebbi Aharon Rot, citing “sefarim”, p. 2 – Music is a path to go to “higher” places in Heaven.**

The Chamber of Music is one of the closest Chambers to us; yet it goes higher and higher, to the highest of the Chambers.

היכל הניגון הוא מהיכלין הקרובות אלינו, ועולה והולך עד רום ההיכלין.

Since music is clearly a powerful spiritual connector, it is not surprising that we see the entire world is affected by the power of song. However, the question is how that music can be channeled. Rashi (Bereishit 4:21) points out, when Yuval originally invented instrumental music (see Part A. Source 1) it was a means for idol worship. The Malbim writes that Yuval created music for licentious purposes. It was only later in history that music was applied for honorable goals. The proper utilization of music reflects the Jewish principle that God created resources in the world that are morally neutral to enable us to choose whether to channel them towards productive or destructive goals. (See further the Morasha classes on Free Will and Spirituality.)

We will now explore how songs play a role in Jewish thought and practice.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- ∞ **Vocal song was first expressed by Adam HaRishon (the first man) singing a song praising the Sabbath. Instrumental music was invented by Adam's seventh generation descendent, Tuval.**

- ☞ Music is an elevated wisdom. Because it is so ethereal and refined, it has the power to impart a deep understanding and to touch the depth of our psyche.
- ☞ A suggested reason for why music touches us so deeply is that our souls intuitively recognize song as the angelic expression of God's unity.
- ☞ Music has a profound effect on our emotional condition. It has the power to cheer and to revive.
- ☞ Music's ability to affect our spiritual mood made it an effective tool for achieving a state of prophecy.

SECTION II. BIBLICAL SHIRAH (SONG)

Song is a powerful medium for expressing our realization of God's glory. Specifically, the medium of song can reflect His creation of the world and the overarching and all-encompassing "Divine Providence" that is always present.

To appreciate how effective song is as an expression of Jewish spirituality, we will first examine songs that appear in the Tanach (Torah, Neviim [Prophets] and Ketuvim [Writings]), where music and song, based on various levels of Divine Inspiration and prophecy, are often highlighted. We will begin our exploration of the Jewish concept of music by focusing on how song is portrayed in our holy texts.

PART A. THE ALL-TIME "TOP TEN"

Shirah, song, is mentioned many times in the Torah as an expression of gratitude to God – usually for a miraculous personal or national salvation. The *Midrash* lists ten archetypal songs that reached the highest level song can reach. These songs can be considered the "Top Ten" of all time. As Rabbi Avraham Arie Trugman puts it (The Mystical Power of Music, pg. 37): "We see from these songs that music accompanies mankind from its inception till the awaited Messianic era."

1. Targum to Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs), Introduction – History knows of ten true songs.

Ten songs were spoken in this world, this song being the best of them all:

The first song Adam spoke at the time he was forgiven for his iniquity and the Sabbath Day arrived and protected him. He opened his mouth and said, "A Psalm, a Song for the Sabbath Day" (Psalm 92).

עסרתי שירתא אתאמרו בעלמא הדין שירא דין
משבח מן כלהון:

שירתא קמייתא אמר אדם בזמן דאשתבך ליה
חובתיה ואתא יומא דשבתא ואגן עלוי פתח
פומיה ואמר מזמור שיר ליומא דשבתא:

The second song Moses said with the Children of Israel at the time the Master of the World divided the Sea of Reeds for them...

The third song the Children of Israel spoke at the time the well of water was given to them...

The fourth song Moses, the prophet, uttered, when his time had come to depart from the world. And by it he reproved the people of the House of Israel...

The fifth song Joshua, son of Nun, spoke when he waged war in Gibeon, and the sun and moon stood for him thirty-six hours, and they ceased to utter the song [of their praise]...

The sixth song Barak and Deborah said on the day God delivered Sisra and his camp into the hands of the Children of Israel...

The seventh song Hannah said at the time she was granted a son from before God...

The eighth song David, King of Israel, said because of all the miracles which God had performed for him...

The ninth song Solomon, King of Israel, said by Divine Inspiration, before the Master of the entire World [Song of Songs].

And the tenth song the children of the Exile are destined to say at the time they are redeemed from Exile.

שירתא תנייתא אמר משה עם בנוי דישראל
בזמן די בוע להון מרי עלמא ית ימא דסוף...

שירתא תליתאה אמרו בנוי דישראל בזמן
דאתיהבת להון בארא דמיא...

שירתא רביעאה אמר משה נביא כד אתא
זמניה למפטר מן עלמא ואוכח בה ית עמא בית
ישראל...

שירתא חמישאה אמר יהושע בר נון כד אגח
קרנא בגבעון וקמו ליה שמשא וסיהרא תלתין
ושית שעין ופסקו מלמימר שירתא...

שירתא שתיתאה אמרו ברק ודבורה ביומא
דמסר ה' ית סיסרא וית משריתיה ביד בנוי
דישראל...

שירתא שביעאה אמרה חנה בזמן דאתיהבת לה
בר מן קדם ה'...

שירתא תמיניתא אמר דוד מלכא דישראל על
כל ניסיא דעבד ליה ה'...

שירתא תשיעאה אמר שלמה מלכא דישראל
ברוח קודשא קדם רבון כל עלמא ה'.

ושירתא עשירתא עתידין למימר בני גלותא
בעידן דיפקון מגלותא.

Most of the songs mentioned in this list were sung by people who witnessed a miraculous salvation. They were not just saying “thank you.” They were inspired to sing in appreciation of God’s infinite direction of this world. This appreciation received an intimate expression in the form of song.

2. **Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnat Rabbi Aharon, Vol. III, pg. 3 – Song expresses thanks and generates greater awareness of God.**

Song and praise for a miracle have two aspects to them. The first is gratitude and giving thanks (for the miracle). This on its own creates closeness and cleaving to God because song awakens the soul. But there is another aspect, that of coming to greater recognition of God's Providence and greatness.

בשירה והלל על הנס ישנם ב' ענינים, ענין הכרת הטוב וההודאה עליו, ומזה יוצא ממילא התקרבות להשי"ת בדבקות, כפי שהשירה מסוגלת לעורר את הנפש. ועוד בזה ענין, להכיר יותר את השגחתו יתברך ורוממותו.

Song is the natural mode of expression for somebody who witnesses the "big picture" of Divine Providence over the world.

3. **Rabbi Chaim Freidlander, Siftei Chaim, Vol. II, pg. 424 – Just as a song is a melodious fusion of individual tones, life is God's synthesis of various events.**

Song is comprised of a sequence of tones. Each tone on its own cannot produce the sweetness of song. It is specifically the assembly of separate tones, arranged in sequence, that makes a song beautiful and sweet to the listener's ear.

Perhaps we could say that **shir** is related to the word **shurah**, meaning "line." Just as a line orders things sequentially, so too does a song.

The idea of seeing the big picture of God's glory – the perception of something beyond time that unites all individual events toward one ultimate purpose – is similar to the structure of a song. Each detail is perceived as a link in the continuous chain of God's orchestration of events, from the beginning of creation until its end. Every detail is a stage in the development of God's glory revealed by the entire creation. Seeing this big picture reveals the beauty and perfection of God's orchestration.

שיר מורכב מהמשכיות של טונים. כאשר בכל טון כשלעצמו אין בו את הערבות של השיר, ורק בצירוף של כל הטונים הנפרדים בהמשכיות אחת בזה אחר זה ובסדר ראוי, הוא הנותן לשיר את יופיו ואת ערבותו לאוזני השומע.

אפשר לומר ש'שיר' הוא מלשון שורה, כמו שבשורה מסודרים הדברים זה אחר זה בהמשכיות כן הוא בשירה.

וכמבנה השירה כך מהות ענינה שהיא הראיה הכללית - למעלה מהזמן המאחדת את כל המאורעות הנפרדים למטרה האחת - כבוד השם יתברך, דהיינו לראות איך כל פרט הוא טבעת אחת בשרשרת הנמשכת של הנהגת השם יתברך והשגחתו מתחילת הבריאה ועד סופה, וכל פרט מהווה נדבך אחד בכניית כבוד השם יתברך היוצא מהבריאה כולה. ועל ידי הראיה הכוללת מתגלה יופי ושלמות הנהגתו יתברך.

PART B. SHIR SHEL YAM – THE SONG AT THE SEA

One of the ten archetypical songs noted by the Midrash was the song sung by the Jewish people after the splitting of the sea and the drowning of their Egyptian pursuers. The experience of this miracle inspired the Jewish people to sing in spontaneous unison.

1. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 30b – The Song at the Sea was uttered in unison through Divine Inspiration.

At the time the Israelites ascended from the Sea of Reeds, they desired to utter a song. How did they render the song?...R. Nehemiah declares: Like a cantor leading the recitation of Shema in the Synagogue... R. Nehemiah believes that [the words in the verse] “and they spoke” indicate that they sang in unison.

Rashi – Divine Inspiration rested upon all of them, so that they all uttered the Song in unison, just as it is written [in the Torah].

ת"ר בו ביום ... בשעה שעלו ישראל מן הים נתנו עיניהם לומר שירה וכיצד אמרו שירה? ... רבי נחמיה אומר: כסופר הפורס על שמע בבית הכנסת ... ור' נחמיה סבר: ויאמרו - דאמור כולהו בהדי הדדי.

רש"י - וכך שרתה רוח הקודש על כולם וכוונו יחד את השירה ככתבה.

According to another Midrash, the Song at the Sea was the first true song ever to be sung!

2. Shemot Rabbah 23:4 – The Song at the Sea was the first true song.

From the day when God created the world until the Israelites stood by the sea, no one except Israel sang unto God. He created Adam, yet he did not utter Song; He delivered Abraham from the fiery furnace and from the kings, and he did not utter Song; likewise, neither Isaac, when saved from the knife, nor Jacob, after escaping alive from the angel, from Esau and from the men of Shechem, uttered Song. But as soon as Israel came to the Sea, which was divided for them, they uttered Song before God, as it says: “Thereupon sang Moshe and the Children of Israel.” This is the meaning of, “She opens her mouth with wisdom.” God said: “For these have I waited.”

מיום שברא הקב"ה את העולם ועד שעמדו ישראל על הים לא מצינו אדם שאמר שירה להקב"ה אלא ישראל, ברא אדם הראשון ולא אמר שירה הציל אברהם מכבשן האש ומן המלכים ולא אמר שירה, וכן יצחק מן המאכלת ולא אמר שירה, וכן יעקב מן המלאך ומן עשו ומן אנשי שכם ולא אמר שירה, כיון שבאו ישראל לים ונקרע להם מיד אמרו שירה לפני הקב"ה שנא' אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל הוי פיה פתחה בחכמה, אמר הקב"ה לאלו הייתי מצפה

What was so special about the song that was sung by the sea? What is it that God was “waiting for?” It appears that although all forms of song are inspired by a glimpse of the “bigger picture,” only the Song at the Sea fully expressed the realization of the totality of Divine Providence over the world.

3. **Rabbi Gedalya Shor, Ohr Gedalyahu, Parshat Beshalach, pg. 74 – The Song at the Sea expressed an appreciation for the negative as well as the positive.**

The fundamental idea of song is seeing God's glory in the creation and bringing it to revelation. Although there were others for whom miracles were wrought, their song was limited to the miracle itself and the salvation from evil. But to sing a song to God over the suffering of exile itself – such a thing had never been done until the Jewish people came and sang. This is the main point of song – the recognition through the creation that everything is in God's hands. Even troubles increase Divine glory. What appeared at the time as concealment of God, or lack of revelation, was found after the redemption as worthy of song – for everything is one great revelation of God's glory. This is what caused the Jewish people to sing. All previous songs related specifically to the supernatural occurrence, and the suspension of the laws of nature. In contrast, at the Sea, the Jewish people sang about the natural order itself.

אלא שעיקר ענין השירה הוא, להראות הכבוד שמים שיש בהבריאה, ולהביאה לידי גלוי, ואף שכבר היו אנשים שאמרו שירה על נס שאירע להם, לא אמרו שירה רק על הנס וההצלה מן הרע, אבל להגיד שירה באופן כזה שיאמרו שירה להקב"ה גם על יסורי הגלות דבר זה לא מצינו, עד שבאו בני ישראל ואמרו שירה, כי זה עיקר ענין השירה, שיבוא ההכרה מתוך הבריאה שהכל הוא ביד השי"ת, ושגם מהצרות נתרבה כבוד שמים, ומה שהי' נראה להם בעת הצרה כהסתר וכאילו אינו כבוד שמים, ראו בני"אחר הגאולה כי על הכל ראוי לשיר להשי"ת, והכל הוא לצורך כבוד שמים, ועל זה אמרו בני"א שירה. וכל השירות שקודם לכן הי' על שנוי הטבע ושדוד המערכות, משא"כ בני ישראל על הים אמרו שירה על הטבע גופא.

An all-encompassing song includes the bad with the good, the sadness with the joy, and expresses the true totality of Divine providence over the creation. Even what we perceive as evil and negative is recognized as part of the process.

PART C. PEREK SHIRAH

The idea that creation, when understood correctly, is a revelation of God, is not limited to human history. Although human history brings the point out most strongly, other parts of creation – even the basic elements of the physical world – have something to reveal to us. They too declare recognition of God's plan.

An ancient text called Perek Shirah, the “Chapter of Song” – attributed by some to King David or King Solomon or Sages of the Mishnah – expresses this idea. This work ascribes Biblical verses to animals and elements in the natural world. Each animal and each element has its own song – its unique expression of God's glory.

1. **Rabbi Nosson Scherman, Perek Shirah - the Song of the Universe, ArtScroll Publications, pp. 6,8 – Three opinions of who or what sings the songs of Perek Shirah.**

Perek Shirah, the “Chapter of Song,” is a collection of songs that none of us is able to hear. It contains the verses “sung” respectively by eighty-five components of Creation – the heavenly bodies, the mountains and oceans, animals, birds, fish and insects.

There are three opinions regarding who or what actually “sings” the eighty-five songs in Perek Shirah. Some say that each creature literally sings its own song. Human beings cannot hear them, of course, just as there are many sounds in nature that human senses cannot detect, but are there nonetheless. A second opinion is that the singing is done by angels. As the Sages have taught, even a blade of grass has an angel that guides its growth, and those angels sing the respective songs of their charges. The third opinion is that the songs are not actually spoken; they are implicit in the existence of the creatures and their roles in the universe. Accordingly, one who understands the function of the sun, the ocean, or a cat or dog would understand what we should learn from it, and that is its song.

2. **Rabbi Avraham Arie Trugman, The Mystical Power of Music, pg. 66 – The entire universe sings the glory of the Creator and has something to teach us about God’s world.**

In this short and concise text, different creations sing specific verses from the Torah. Why each creation sings its particular verse is not explained, though many of the explanations are obvious. A few examples are:

The palm says: “The righteous flourish like the palm tree; they grow like the cedar of Lebanon” [Psalms 92: 13].

The seas say: “More than the voices of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea, God on high is mighty” [Psalms 98:8].

The moon says: “He made the moon for the festivals; the sun knows the time of its coming” [Psalms 104: 19].

The ant says: “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways and be wise” [Proverbs 6:6].

3. **Rabbi Nosson Scherman, Perek Shirah, pp. 8, 13 – What is shirah?**

What is shirah/song? In modern times, we are surrounded by music, in entertainment, the home, stores, the street, from passing cars; it seems impossible to escape it. But this is not the song of Perek Shirah, nor is it what Scripture calls shirah. Even classic symphonies are not shirah.

What then is shirah? What is unique about Perek Shirah? And why is it that of all the creatures serenading us in this book, one is strangely absent: where is the song of Man? Why are there no people in the symphony of Creation that is Perek Shirah?

In the twenty-first century, the heavens are telling us infinitely more than they told our ancestors. Centuries ago people knew only our own solar system, and precious little about that. With the passage of time, and the invention of new and more powerful telescopes, we now know that our solar system and even our entire galaxy are very small parts of an ever-expanding universe. The vast body of astronomical knowledge grows day by day. And from time to time, new discoveries force reevaluation of rules of physics and astronomy that were considered firm and impregnable.

All of this is included in the song of heaven. Truly, it declares the glory of God, its Creator!

From towering Mount Everest and the mighty Amazon River to the industrious ant and the web-spinning spider, every part of Creation sings its praise to God and its message to man.

When do they sing it? Every second. What is their song? Verses that express the God-ordained tasks that they perform continuously. Every creature serves God perfectly and without interruption, for it does what it was created to do; it cannot do otherwise. These are the songs of Perek Shirah. Only man is the exception. He has no song in Perek Shirah. Why not?

4. **Ibid., pp.13-15 – Why man has no song in Perek Shirah.**

Maharal explains why. There is a basic difference between potential and performance. Potential is important, but only if it is realized; unrealized potential is worse than meaningless, it is a tragic waste. The songs of the creatures in this book are not potential, not intermittent outbursts of ecstasy; they are constant, uninterrupted expressions of the instinctive mission which God instilled within them. In an orchestra of a hundred instruments, when each musician plays his assigned part, the result is a sound that can seem almost heavenly in its beauty. But if each musician plays what he pleases, when he pleases, without regard to the other ninety-nine, the result will be horrendous noise. In Creation, too, every cog has its own function. When all eighty-five “musicians” mentioned in Perek Shirah do what they were created to do, the result is the Song of the Universe.

In this we see the basic difference between man and all the other creatures. Man vacillates between the aspirations of his soul and the desires of his body. He can have his great moments, but for most people they are few, and even for great people they are often interrupted. The sun is always bright; man is often dark. That is why man has no song in Perek Shirah.

How can man lift himself above his inner adversary and rise to the level of shirah? Maharal explains that Shirah/Song is a product of שלמות, wholeness, meaning that

shirah is attained only when God's will is actually fulfilled, and fulfilled perfectly. In addition, there must also be a realization that God is involved and provident, and that He is always just. This condition has happened but rarely...

Man rises to the level of shirah when he perceives that the world is never turned loose to spin haphazardly. Unseen but always present, God controls events and guides history toward the Final Redemption, when each event will be acknowledged as an ingredient in the brew of goodness.

It is true that the creatures of the universe sing their own songs constantly, never failing to serve God. It is also true, however, that the center of the universe is man. He must not only recognize God, but to the extent that he does so, his service of God energizes and elevates the rest of Creation.

It is interesting to note that although not included in Perek Shira, the Sabbath Day sings praise to God, in Psalm 92 [Abudraham - cited in Tefillah L'Moshe], which was later written down through prophecy by King David. We recall this in our Shabbat morning prayers, "This is the praise of the Seventh Day: that on it God rested from all His work. *And the Seventh Day offers praise saying, 'A psalm, a song for the Sabbath Day. It is good to thank God...'*"

PART D. THE SONG OF TORAH

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote that there are two revelations of God in this world. One we have just discussed: nature. The world sings God's praises. The other is Torah, which is the direct transmission of God's word to mankind. It, too, is a song.

1. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 31:19 – The Torah refers to itself as a song.**

Now write for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites. Make them memorize it, so that this song will be a witness for the Israelites.

ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת ולמדה את בני ישראל שימה בפיהם למען תהיה לי השירה הזאת לעד בבני ישראל:

Why does the Torah refer to itself as a song? It is not written in verse. It does not rhyme. In what way can we call it a song?

Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin) interprets this to mean that the whole Torah should be read as poetry, not prose. To be sure, most of the Torah is written in prose. Yet it has, argues Netziv, two characteristics of poetry:

2. **Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, Kidmat Haamek, Preface to Haamek Davar, 3 – The Torah is allusive rather than explicit and it hints at deeper reservoirs of meaning, sometimes by the use of an unusual word or sentence construction.**

Why is the Torah called a song? After all, it is not written like a song. But (seeing as the

יש להבין היאך נקרא כה"ת שירה. והרי לא נכתבה בלשון של שירה. אלא ע"כ יש בה טבע

Torah calls itself a song) it must in some way resemble song in nature, which is a nuanced form of speech. For anyone who knows the difference between poetry and prose knows that there are two essential differences:

1) A song is not as straight-forward as a simple story. It needs commentary to explain how a certain phrase refers to this or that. This is not farfetched interpretation but is rather the nature of even the simplest song. One who understands the subject of the song will better appreciate the sweetness of its expression and will see therein far more detail than someone who merely considers it a metaphor. The latter leads to false hypotheses of notions that were not intended by the composer.

Such is the nature of the Torah, in that its story is not obvious but rather requires elucidation and linguistic analysis. This is not hermeneutics, but rather interpretation of basic meaning. It is obvious that no one can appreciate the precise intention of God's words without connecting them to the laws and ethical principles of the Oral Tradition.

2) A song hints to matters that are ostensibly unrelated to the subject of the song, such as when the first letters of each verse form an acrostic of the alphabet or the name of the song's composer. Such hints are characteristic of poetry and not prose. As is known, such hints force the composer to bend the language a bit. We find this concept throughout the Torah. Besides the obvious subject of the text, each part contains many hints and hidden meanings, and therefore the verse is constructed in a somewhat ambiguous way.

וסגולת השירה. שהוא דבור בלשון מליצה. ידידע לכל מבין עם תלמוד דמשונה לשון המליצה מספור פרוי בשני ענינים בטבע ובסגולה:

א) דבשיר אין הענין מבואר יפה כמו בספור פרוי. וצריך לעשות הערות מן הצד. דזה החרוז כוון לזה הספור. וזה החרוז כוון לזה. ולא מיקרי דרוש. אלא כך הוא טבע השיר אפי' של הדיוט. ומושכל עוד דמי שיודע בטוב הענין שהביא לידי מליצה זו שנתחבר עליו. מתוק לו אור לשון של השיר ודקדוקה הרבה יותר מלאיש שאין לו ידיעה מתכונת הענין ורק בא להתבונן מן המליצה תורף הענין. כי אז עלול הוא להשערות בדויות. מה שלא הי' מעולם ולא לזה כוון המשורר.

כך הוא טבע כל התורה שאין הספור שבה מבואר יפה. אלא יש לעשות הערות ופירושים לדקדוקי הלשון. ולא נקרא דרוש. אלא כך הוא פשט המקרא. ומושכל עוד שאין אדם יכול לעמוד על דקדוק דבר ה' אם לא שמכוין לאיזה דבר הלכה או מוסר ואגדה הבא בקבלה בדברי חז"ל.

ב) דבשיר יש סגולה לפארה ברמזים מה שאינו מענין השיר. כמו שנהוג לעשות ראשי החרוזים בדרך א"ב או שם המחבר. וסגולה זו מיוחדת במליצה ולא בספור פרוי. וידוע דסגולה זו מכרחת הרבה פעמים להמחבר לעקם את הלשון כמעט. רק כדי שיחלו ראשי החרוזים באות הנדרש לו. ודבר זה ממש היא בכל התורה כולה. שמלבד הענין המדובר בפשט המקרא. עוד יש בכל דבר הרבה סודות וענינים נעלמים אשר מחמת זה בא כ"פ המקרא בלשון שאינו מדויק כ"כ.

To this we can add that the Torah, like the grand song of creation, is all-encompassing. The Torah includes the bad with the good, calamity with celebration. All - both the ups and the downs - are part of the holy Torah. In this sense, Torah is certainly song.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- ☞ The Torah views song or *shirah* as an expression of God's glory. The Midrash lists ten archetypal songs that achieved this at the highest level.
- ☞ According to one Midrash, the greatest expression of this realization is the Song at the Sea. The Jewish People not only expressed thanks for their miraculous salvation, but even came to appreciate the purpose of their suffering in Egypt.
- ☞ *Perek Shirah* shows how the entire creation reveals the hand of God.
- ☞ The Torah too sings of God's glory. It is rightfully called a song for the depth of its expression and its all-embracing nature.

SECTION III. TEMPLE MUSIC

Perhaps the central venue for music in Judaism was in the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem. At the Temple site the Levites would sing and play music to accompany the sacrificial services performed by the Kohanim, the priests. The songs they sang were the psalms composed by King David. After the destruction of the Temple, these songs were incorporated into the daily prayer services.

PART A. THE LEVITES

The tribe of Levi did not receive a portion of the land of Israel. Like their brethren the Kohanim, Levites were supported by means of tithes and gifts given by the general population. This gave them the freedom to focus on their main occupation as spiritual guides to the Jewish people.

One of the Levites' principal duties was the service in the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem. While the actual sacrifices and other services were performed by the Kohanim, the Levites contributed to the service by singing and playing music.

1. **Talmud Bavli, Erchin 11a – The Temple service required the accompaniment of song.**

Our Rabbis taught: The omission of the song invalidates the sacrifice; this is the view of Rabbi Meir. The Sages, however, maintain that the omission of the song does not invalidate the sacrifice.

תנו רבנן: השיר מעכב את הקרבן, דברי רבי מאיר; וחכמים אומרים: אינו מעכב.

The Talmud goes on to suggest ten possible sources for how the obligation of playing music during the sacrificial service is derived from Scripture.

The Levites sang a different psalm for each day of the week.

2. **Mishnah, Tamid 7:4 – The Levites sang a special song for each day – a practice incorporated into our daily prayers.**

The following are the psalms that were chanted in the Temple: On the first day they used to say, “The Earth and its fullness are God’s, the world and they that dwell therein.” On the second day they used to say, “Great is God and highly praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain.” On the third day they used to say, “God stands in the congregation of God, in the midst of the judges He judges.” On the fourth day they used to say, “Lord of vengeance is God, God to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth.” On the fifth day they used to say, “Sing joyously unto God our strength, shout unto the God of Jacob.” On the sixth day they used to say, “God reigns, He is clothed in majesty, God is clothed, He has girded himself with strength.” On Shabbat they used to say, “A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day.” A psalm, a song for the Time to Come, for the day that will be all Shabbat and rest for everlasting life.

השיר שהיו הלויים אומרים במקדש ביום הראשון היו אומרים לה' הארץ ומלואה תבל ויושבי בה בשני היו אומרים גדול ה' ומהלל מאד בעיר אלהינו הר קדשו בשלישי היו אומרים אלהים נצב בעדת אל בקרב אלהים ישפוט ברביעי היו אומרים אל נקמות ה' אל נקמות הופיע וגו' בחמישי היו אומרים הרנינו לאלהים עזנו הריעו לאלהי יעקב בששי היו אומרים ה' מלך גאות לבש וגו' בשבת היו אומרים מזמור שיר ליום השבת מזמור שיר לעתיד לבא ליום שכולו שבת מנוחה לחיי העולמים:

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 31a) explains how each one of the psalms parallels what happened on its corresponding day in the six days of creation.

Music, in the form of the Levites' singing, was central to the Temple experience. It was likewise central to the lives of the Levites.

3. **Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, The Kuzari, Part II, Ch. 64 – The main profession of the Levites was music.**

As far as musical knowledge is concerned, consider for yourself how this nation has venerated its melodies and given the responsibility of its national music to its leaders, the Levites. They would engage themselves in these melodies in the distinguished Temple at distinguished times. They were not financially burdened,

אבל חכמת המוסיקא, חשוב באומה שהיא מכבדת הנגונים ומעמדת אותם על הגדולים שבעם, והם בני לוי, מתעסקים בנגונים בבית הנכבד בעתים הנכבדים, ולא הוצרכו להתעסק בצרכי הפרנסה במה שהיו לוקחים מהמעשרות ולא היה להם עסק זולתי המוסיקא. והמלאכה נכבדת אצל בני אדם, כאשר היא בעצמה אינה גרועה ולא פחותה, והעם מחשיבות השרש

since they were sustained by the community tithes, so they had no pursuits other than music. [The Levites were glad to engage in music because] its pursuit was greatly esteemed by all, for it was not a demeaning or lowly occupation. Those in the nation [who were involved with music] were of important stock and thoroughly pure, and the forerunners of this devotional music were David and Shmuel. What, then, do you think – did they know the sphere of music well or not?

וזכות הטבע כאשר הם, ומראשיהם במלאכה
דוד ושמואל. ומה תחשוב במוסיקא ההיו
יודעים אותה על אופניה אם לא?

PART B. JOYOUS DEVOTION

The singing and music of the Levites created an atmosphere of joy and elevation in the Beit HaMikdash. Joy is a central facet of Jewish observance. The mitzvot are not to be performed by rote or out of a feeling of coercion, but with joy; music was an important part of the worship. It is possible that this was the basic reason the Levites played music in the Temple.

1. **Rabbeinu Bachaya, Introduction to Parshat Nasso – The Levites sang in the Beit HaMikdash to arouse *simchah* (joy) in performing mitzvot – the ultimate religious expression.**

It is known that joy in performing the mitzvot is itself a mitzvah in its own right. Just as performing a mitzvah is service of God, so too joy in performing a mitzvah is called “service.” That is what is written [in regard to the reason the Jews suffer exile], “because you did not *serve* the Lord your God with joy” (Devarim 28:47). Similarly it is written, “Serve the Lord your God with joy” (Tehillim/Psalms 100:2). The explanation is that joy is the ultimate fulfillment of service to God.

Such was the idea of having song in the Beit HaMikdash, singing and playing instruments, for they bring a person to joy. This is the meaning of the verse regarding the Levites, “to serve the service of the service,” which the Sages expounded in the

וידוע כי השמחה במעשה המצות מצוה בפני עצמה, וכשם שהמצוה עבודה לשי"ת כך השמחה על המצוה נקראת עבודה, וכן כתיב: (דברים כח, מז) “תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלהיך בשמחה”, והוא שכתוב: (תהלים ק, ב) “עבדו את ה' בשמחה”, באר כי השמחה שלמות העבודה.

ועל כן היה ענין השיר במקדש ובמשכן בשיר הפה והכלי שהוא מביא נפש האדם לדרך השמחה, ומכאן אמר הכתוב בלויים: “לעבוד עבודת עבודה”, ודרשו רז“ל: (ערכין יא א) אי זו עבודה לעבודה, הוי אומר זה השיר, כי היו הלויים מוזהרין ומצווים לשורר ולעורר השמחה על

following way: “Which service functions to serve a service? It must be song.” That is because the Levites were commanded to sing and to awaken the joy of performing the mitzvot of the sacrifices – in order that the act of the mitzvah be done in a state of joy.

מצות הקרבן כדי להיות מעשה המצוה בשמחה.

2. **Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenberg, HaKetav VeHaKabbalah to Bamidbar 4:47 – Joy is the highest level of serving God and performing mitzvot, and it is achieved through music.**

In the same way as a commandment is service to God, may He be blessed, so is the joy of the commandment called service, as it is written, “because you did not serve the Lord, your G-d, with joy” (Devarim 28:47). Behold, joy perfects our service. Therefore, the music that the Levites produced to arouse joy in the offering of sacrifices is dubbed “service to a service.”

עבדת עבודה. הוא השיר (רש"י), כי כשם שהמצוה עבודה להש"י כן השמחה על המצוה נקראת עבודה, כמ"ש תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה"א בשמחה, הנה השמחה היא שלמות העבודה, לכן השיר שהיו הלויים משוררים לעורר השמחה על מצות הקרבה, כדי להיות מעשה המצוה בשמחה, נקרא עבדת עבודה, ומקרא מלא הוא (דה"ב ל"ט) והמשוררים בני אסף על מעמדם אין להם לסור מעל עבודתם (רב"ח).

Music is “service to a service” because it transforms the service of sacrifices into a total and perfect service to God by infusing it with joy.

3. **Shomer Emunim (Quoted by Rabbi Sandler, pg. 59) – Music is the most potent way to arouse joy and love of God.**

Nothing can arouse joy and love of God, may He be blessed, like music.

ואין לך דבר שמסוגל לעורר השמחה ואהבה לה' יתברך כמו הניגון.

PART C. KING DAVID AND TEHILLIM

The songs sung by the Levites were the psalms composed mostly by King David. But King David did not just write the words with Divine Inspiration; he also composed a score for specific instruments unique for each psalm.

1. **Shmuel II 23:1 – King David is known as the “sweet singer of Israel.”**

And these are the last words of David, said by David the son of Jesse, said by the man

ואלה דברי דוד האחרנים נאם דוד בן ישי ונאם הגבר הקם על משיח אלהי יעקב ונעים זמרות

raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet singer of Israel.

ישראל.

2. Radak, Tehillim, Ch. 4 – Each psalm was sung with its own tune.

Some psalms were sung with an acoustic accompaniment called “naginat” and others with an instrument called “shminit.” These songs, tunes, or praises were sung with the accompaniment, each one with its assigned tune. This was a profound wisdom that would awaken the soul of the intellect; it is counted among the secular sciences.

ויש שהיה מנצח על כלי הנקרא נגינות, ויש על כלי הנקרא שמינית. ועם הכלים היו נאמרים השירים והניגונים והתהלות, כל אחד לפי ניגונו הידוע אצלם, כי חכמה גדולה היתה והיא תעורר הנפש החכמה, והיא נחלקת ונספרת בכלל החכמות החיצונות.

Based on this commentary of Radak, Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon writes that no chapter of Tehillim can be fully understood without knowing how it goes together with the designated instrument (Matnat Chaim, Moadim, pg. 154).

We noted before that the Levites’ songs were intended to arouse joy in the hearts of those who heard them. Sefer Chasidim writes that the same is true of David’s psalms in general.

3. Rabbi Yehudah Hechassid, Sefer Chassidim 18 – Instrumental music to arouse joy.

The root of prayer is the heart’s rejoicing in God, as it states: “Be glorified with His holy Name. Be glad of heart, those who seek God (Divrei Hayamim I 16:10).” This is why David, King of Israel, used to accompany his prayers and songs with the playing of a harp. The intention was to fill his heart with joy out of his love of God.

שורש התפילה שמחת הלב בהקב"ה, שנאמר, "התהללו בשם קדשו, ישמח לב מבקשי ה'" - ולפיכך היה דוד מלך ישראל מנגן בכנור, על כל תפלותיו וזמירותיו, כדי למלאות לבבו שמחה, באהבתו של הקב"ה.

Though Nazism was an anti-Christian movement, its success in killing the Jews of Europe was built upon traditional Christian hatred for the Jews and drew on its teachings to support the Nazi philosophy.

PART D. SINGING IN SYNAGOGUE

After the destruction of the Temple, prayer replaced the *Avodah* (sacrificial worship) as a means of building a relationship with God on both personal and national levels. This idea is hinted at in the following verse:

1. **Hoshea (Hosea) 14:3 – No longer with a Temple, our prayers replace the sacrifices.**

Instead of bulls [i.e., sacrifices] we will offer the words of our lips [i.e., prayer].

ונשלמה פרים שפתינו.

How does prayer replace Avodah?

2. **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, The Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. II – There is an important connection between prayer and the Temple sacrifices.**

Prayer is considered the service of God similar to the sacrifices of the Beit HaMikdash. The Psalmist thus said, “Let my prayer be set forth as incense before You, the lifting of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psalms 141:2). Just as a sacrifice unites the spiritual and material by making a lowly animal the object of serving God, so does prayer unite the spiritual and material by making the request of our material needs a service of God. It is for this reason that, when it is impossible to bring sacrifices, prayer can be offered in their stead, as the prophet exclaimed, “We will offer the words of our lips instead of calves” (Hosea 14:3).

Thus, formal prayers were ordained in place of the regular daily sacrifices performed in the Temple in Jerusalem – which themselves were accompanied by prayer and song. Moreover, the prayer of a sincere heart is better than any sacrifice, as the Psalmist exclaimed, “I will praise the name of God with a song, I will exalt Him with thanksgiving, and it shall please God more than the offering of an ox” (Psalms 69:31-32).

We may have lost the Temple with its sacrificial service; we may even have lost the original tunes that accompanied those sacrifices. But we still have prayer. In fact, much of our prayer service today consists of the Psalms of King David. Song is a central feature of these services.

3. **Rabbi Avraham Arie H Trugman, The Mystical Power of Music, pp. 28-29 – After the destruction of the Temple, its structure and services still shape our synagogues and prayer services.**

Although the Temple was destroyed nearly two thousand years ago, the Sages were able to take all the main components of the physical Temple and the service that was performed there throughout the year and translate them into our various prayer services and the physical makeup of our synagogues today. The order, timing, and content of the daily, Shabbat, and holiday services include many aspects of the Temple service as it was performed two thousand years ago. Even the physical structure of the synagogue and its main symbols and motifs mirror the structure of the Temple.

For example, the bimah, the central table in the synagogue, represents the outer altar where the sacrifices were offered. We are taught that our prayers today are a direct replacement of those offerings. The *aron kodesh*, the ark, containing the Torah scrolls,

represents the Torah scroll and the tablets of the law that rested in the ark in the Holy of Holies, and the curtain in front of the aron kodesh today represents the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies. The *ner tamid*, the everlasting light, in the synagogue represents the seven-branched menorah, the candelabrum. Our synagogues all face Jerusalem in memory of the Temple itself. The *mechitzah*, or divider, of today is modeled on the separation made by the Sages in certain areas of the Temple in order to separate men and women.

As for the prayers, the morning and afternoon services we pray replace the *tamid* offerings, the morning and afternoon daily offerings. The evening prayer replaces the offerings that burned on the altar all night. The *mussaf*, or additional prayer on Shabbat and holidays, replaces the additional offerings brought on these days. Each morning we recite *korbanot*, the readings about the Temple offerings, at the very beginning of prayer, to emphasize the essential connection between the offerings and our prayers today. P'sukei D'zimra, the verses of song, correspond to the songs of the Levites in the Temple in Israel. The priests bless the congregation every day, as they did daily in the Temple (outside of Israel the priestly blessing is recited daily by the prayer leader, and the priests bless the congregation only on holidays). Each day we read the particular song the Levites sang in the Temple. *Tachanun*, verses of repentance, replace the guilt offering, while *Mizmor LeTodah*, a song of thanksgiving, symbolizes the thanksgiving offering.

Though the synagogue service functions as a kind of microcosm of the Temple service, it is nonetheless a far cry from the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

The Kuzari, a great medieval work of Jewish philosophy, is constructed as a fictionalized discussion between a Jewish scholar and the Kuzari, a non-Jewish king searching for the truth. The king makes the following observation about music and Judaism:

4. **Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, The Kuzari, Part II, Ch. 65 – The quality of music has declined through history.**

The Kuzari said: “Undoubtedly, music was very highly developed among [the ancient Jews]. It inspired them spiritually – just as people today say that music can drastically alter a person’s mood. But it is implausible [to think] that music today is of the same quality as it was back then; [in our time] it has lost its status and has been consigned to servants and scoundrels. *It has declined in importance just as your people have declined in importance.*”

אמר הכוזרי: שמה בלי ספק נגמרה ושמה היתה מעוררת הנפשות, כאשר יאמר עליה, שהיא מעתקת את הנפש ממדה אל הפכה, ולא יתכן שתהיה היום בערך ממה שהיתה, מפני ששבה פחותה בהתעסקות בה השפחות והמכוערים מכני אדם, אך ירדה עם חשיבותה כאשר ירדתם אתם עם חשיבותכם.

Whether or not we are sensitive to the Kuzari's observation, music and song still play a central role in Jewish spiritual and liturgical expression.

5. **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "Music, Language of the Soul," from www.aish.com – Music offers a roadmap to Jewish living.**

When we pray, we do not read: we sing. When we engage with sacred texts, we do not recite: we chant. Every text and every time has, in Judaism, its own specific melody. There are different tunes for Shacharit, Minchah and Maariv, the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, Shabbat, the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot (which have much musically in common but also tunes distinctive to each), and for the High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are different tunes for different texts. There is one kind of cantillation for Torah, another for the *haftarah* from the prophetic books, and yet another for Ketuvim, the Writings, especially the five Megillot. There is a particular chant for studying the texts of the written Torah, for studying Mishnah and Talmud. So by music alone we can tell what kind of day it is and what kind of text is being used. There is a map of holy words and it is written in melodies and songs.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- ☞ The ritual services in the Beit HaMikdash were accompanied by the music of the Levites. This tribe trained in the art of music until the age of thirty and served both the priests and Temple-goers with their talents.
- ☞ Music was employed by the Levites to create the appropriate joyous mood required to perform the Divine service.
- ☞ The Levites would sing and play the words and music composed by King David in his Psalms. These Psalms were written with special Divine Inspiration. King David also had in mind particular instruments to be played with each Psalm.
- ☞ In the absence of the Temple, our prayer services in synagogue stand in place of the Temple service. Much of what we recite in our prayers is therefore modeled after the songs of King David and the practice of Levites in singing them. Nonetheless, the song and music we know today are clearly distant from the glory of the First Temple.

SECTION IV. MUSIC TODAY: TOWARDS A NEW SONG

PART A. SINGING IN SYNAGOGUE

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, we were exiled physically and spiritually as we lost clarity of God's direct involvement in our lives. The exile brought the Jewish people into ongoing national mourning. One of the primary manifestations of this mourning is reflected in the area of music.

1. **Tehillim 137:1-6 – The Levites could no longer sing after being exiled from the Land of Israel.**

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, we also wept when we remembered Zion. On willows in its midst we hung our harps. For there our captors asked us for words of song and our tormentors [asked of us] mirth, "Sing for us one of the songs of Zion." How shall we sing the song of the Lord on foreign soil? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget [its skill]; May my tongue cling to my palate, if I do not remember you, if I do not recall [the mourning over] Jerusalem even at the height of my most joyous occasions.

על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו בזכרנו את ציון: על ערבים בתוכה תלינו כנרותינו: כי שם שאלונו שובינו דברי שיר ותוללינו שמחה שירו לנו משיר ציון: איך נשיר את שיר יקוק על אדמת נכר: אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני: תדבק לשוני לחכי אם לא אזכרכי אם לא אעלה את ירושלים על ראש שמחת:

On account of our national mourning over the loss of the Temple, the Sages saw fit to enact a decree against music.

2. **Mishnah, Sotah 48a – A ban was placed on music around the time the Temple was destroyed.**

When the Sanhedrin ceased [to function], song ceased from the places of feasting; as it is said, "they shall not drink wine with a song, etc." (Yeshaya/Isaiah 24:9).

משבטלה סנהדרין - בטל השיר מבית המשתאות, שנאמר: [ישעיהו כד:ט] בשיר לא ישתו יין וגו'.

The same prohibition is mentioned in another Talmudic passage.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Gittin 7a – Even singing is forbidden.**

An inquiry was once addressed to Mar Ukba: Where does Scripture indicate to us that song ought to be forbidden [in these times]? He wrote back [the following quotation]: “Rejoice not, O Israel, unto exultation like the nations, [for you have gone astray from your God]” (Hoshea 9:1).

Should he not rather have sent the following: “They shall not drink wine with music, strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it” (Yeshaya 24:9)? – From this verse we would conclude that only musical instruments are forbidden, but not singing; this we learn [from the other verse].

שלחו ליה למר עוקבא: זמרא מנא לן דאסיר?
שרטט וכתב להו: [הושע ט:א] אל תשמח
ישראל אל גיל בעמים.

ולישלח להו מהכא: [ישעיהו כד:ט] בשיר לא
ישתו יין ימר שכר לשותיו! אי מההוא, ה"א ה"מ
זמרא דמנא, אבל דפומא שרי, קמ"ל.

The Rambam (Ta'anot 5:14) explains that the ban on music was made in commemoration of the destruction of the Temple. Commentators explain that music was banned as a necessary response to the *Churban* (destruction of the Temple) to decrease joy and reflect incompleteness.

4. **Rabbi Aharon Kahn, Music and Halacha, The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, Vol. 14, Rabbi Jacob Joseph School, 1987, pg. 12 – Maharal teaches that banning music was a necessary response to the Churban.**

It is the Maharal's thesis (Chapter 23, Netzach Yisroel) that mourning is a response to loss in a truly existential sense. Churban cannot be localized. It is impossible and improper for us to view the Churban as a loss specific to Yerushalayim (Jerusalem), or to Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) or even to the Jewish nation alone. Churban is a world-wide phenomenon. It has cosmic ramifications affecting both the material and spiritual planes of existence. Our people's mourning is for this cosmic loss.

The Maharal argues further that mourning is not only a reaction to loss, it is also a recognition of loss. Without such awareness, there can be no renewal. Absence allows for ultimate return; that which is yet incomplete allows for fulfillment. If we regard our world as complete and our cup as full, we do not allow for the process of becoming and we shall not strive for completeness. Joy is an expression of completeness. Music was banned where it allows for such joy.

However, the Talmud refers specifically to music combined with drinking and feasting. This is noted by a number of commentaries.

5. **Rashi, Gittin 7a – Only while drinking wine.**

Music (is forbidden) – this refers to singing at drinking parties.

זמרא - לשורר בבית המשתאות.

6. **Tosafot, Gittin 7a – The ban is limited to parties or generally to excessive behavior.**

It is fitting to be stringent in this matter in such cases as mentioned in the Talmud Yerushalmi, of a nobleman falling asleep and awaking to music. Such activity is overly indulgent. However, singing for mitzvot is certainly permissible, such as at a wedding ceremony to gladden the bride and groom.

וראוי להחמיר בכיוצא דההוא בירושלמי דההוה קאים ודמיך בזמרא שמתענג ביותר ושיר של מצוה שרי כגון בשעת חופה שעושין לשמח חתן וכלה.

The opinions of Rashi and Tosafot are noted by the Rema (Orach Chaim 560:3).

Thus, the principal prohibition of listening to music in our times refers to activities that are “overly indulgent” – drinking parties and the like, at which music is played. Although other authorities are most stringent, the common custom is of course that listening to music at home, or even at a concert, is not forbidden.

For the sake of a mitzvah, such as a wedding feast, all agree that music is permitted. On the other hand, at times of national mourning such as during the Omer period and the Three Weeks leading up to Tisha B'Av, the custom is to follow the more stringent view and refrain from listening to and playing music altogether (see Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:166 and Tzitz Eliezer 15:33).

PART B. TOWARDS A NEW SONG

As mentioned earlier in this class – and as alluded to in Section II, Part A, Source 1 – the last of the great songs will be the song of the final redemption. When the Jewish people and the entire world reach their ultimate purpose, it will be to the accompaniment of music.

1. **Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Likkutei Moharan II 8:10 – The song of the future will give expression to a new spiritual awareness.**

In the future, when the world is renewed, the entire universe will operate on the level of wonders – according to providence alone and not according to nature.

וכשיהיה חידוש העולם לעתיד, אז יתנהג העולם ע"י נפלאות. היינו ע"י השגחה לבד, שהיא בחי' נפלאות, שלא כדרך הטבע...

Then a new song shall arise. As the verse says, “Sing a new song to God, for He has done wonders” (Psalms 98:1). This song of the future is a song of God’s providence, a song of wonders. For then He will direct the world with providence and wonders.

There is also a song of nature, as in the verse, “The heavens tell the glory of God, the work of His hands is proclaimed by the firmament” (Psalms 19:2). This is the song of nature, of the astronomical laws. This is the level of song and praise that is sung to God for the way the world is run now, via nature.

But in the future, there will be a new song, a song of wonders, of providence, for then the world will be ruled by providence alone.

ואז יתער שיר חדש, בחי' (תהלים צח) שירו לה' שיר חדש כי נפלאות עשה. היינו השיר שיתער לעתיד, שהוא ניגון של השגחה, בחי' נפלאות. כי אז יתנהג העולם, ע"י השגחה ונפלאות.

כי יש ניגון של בחי' דרך הטבע, וזה בחי' (שם יט) השמים מספרים כבוד אל ומעשה ידיו מגיד הרקיע. שהוא בחי' הניגון והשיר של דרך הטבע, של תכונות השמים. היינו בחי' השירים ותשבחות שמשבחין להש"י על ההנהגה של עכשיו, שמנהיג העולם בדרך הטבע.

אבל לעתיד יתער שיר חדש, של בחי' נפלאות, בחי' השגחה, כי אז יהי' ההנהגה ע"י השגחה לבד.

2. Tzur Mishelo, Shabbat Zemiroth – When the Temple is rebuilt we will sing a new song.

May the Temple be rebuilt, the City of Zion replenished;

There shall we sing a new song, with joyous singing we shall ascend.

יבנה המקדש עיר ציון תמלא,

ושם נשיר שיר חדש וברננה נעלה.

As Jews, we are always looking forward to a world of peace and harmony – harmony in every aspect of life, physical and spiritual. The harmony of future times is destined to produce a song the likes of which has yet to be heard.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV

- ☞ In an age bereft of the Temple, the Sages banned unbridled use of the power of music, and enacted a prohibition against it. This prohibition applies mainly to casual social gatherings where wine is consumed. It applies more broadly during times of national mourning.
- ☞ Certainly, music is permitted for purposes of mitzvot.
- ☞ In times to come, a new harmony is destined to come to the world. At this time, a “new song” – a renewed musical revelation – will be sung, its perfection heralding the beginning of a new era.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHY IS MUSIC SUCH A POWERFUL MEDIUM?

- Some explain that music is rooted in the angelic expression of God's unity. Our souls, which come from those heavens, are therefore deeply affected by it. Music can have a profound effect on our emotional states. It has the power to take us out of depression and revive us. In recent years, we have seen how impacting music can be, not only on individuals but collaboratively, in the 60's rock tunes that fueled the anti-Vietnam War movement and Woodstock.
- Music is also considered a form of wisdom. Because it is so ethereal and refined, it has the power to impart understanding at a deep level within our psyche. It can even help us achieve a state of prophecy.

DOES JEWISH LITERATURE MAKE MENTION OF THE ROLE OF MUSIC?

- The Torah records many songs that voice an expression of Divine revelation. The Midrash lists ten great historical songs, and special mention is made of the Song at the Sea. The uniqueness of this song is that it introduced the concept of expressing praise and gratitude not only for a specific event of salvation, but for the "big picture" (including even the suffering that preceded the redemption).
- An ancient source, *Perek Shirah*, demonstrates how the entire creation reveals the hand of God and sings His praises. Moreover, the entire Torah is referred to as a song, because the Torah, like a song, encompasses the history of the world and all of its details.

DOES MUSIC PLAY ANY ROLE IN THE JEWISH TRADITION?

- Historically the ritual services in the Beit HaMikdash were accompanied by the music of the Levites, who used music to create the mood of joy necessary to perform mitzvot in the way God intended. The Levites would sing and play the words and music composed by King David in the Book of Psalms. These Psalms were written with Divine Inspiration, and King David had in mind particular instruments to be played.

WHY HAS THE WAY WE LISTEN TO MUSIC CHANGED SINCE THE SECOND TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION IN 70 CE?

- After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish people went into ongoing national mourning when we were exiled and lost clarity of God's direct involvement in our lives. One of the primary manifestations of this mourning is reflected in the diminished role of music; overindulgent forms even involve a prohibition. Yet, singing and music continue to inspire our prayer services, our lifecycle celebrations, and our homes.

HOW WILL THE WORLD EXPERIENCE A NEW DIMENSION OF MUSIC WITH THE ADVENT OF THE MESSIANIC ERA?

- When the Jewish people and the entire world reach their ultimate purpose, it will be to the accompaniment of music – the playing of a new song in world history.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

Rabbi Elysha Sandler, Through Music and Song

Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, “The Halachic Status of Music During the Year and in the Sefirah,” at: <http://www.dinonline.org/2011/05/05/the-halachic-status-of-music-during-the-year-and-in-the-sefirah-part-1/> (See also Part 2 of the article for music in periods of mourning.)

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon, Matnat Chaim, Moadim – Purim, “Maskil Zameru”

Rabbi Avraham Arie Trugman, The Mystical Power of Music

Halachipedia.com, Entry: Listening to Music