

Three Interesting Debates on The Torah Reading for the Seventh Day of Passover
 Rabbi Eliot Malomet *Seventh Day of Passover 5783 April 12, 2023*

Is the Song of the Sea like the Sh'ma or Hallel? Is Reciting it an Intellectual or Emotional Experience?

<p>מכילתא דר' ישמעאל שמות טו:א</p> <p>אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת לה' ויאמרו לאמר ויאמרו לאמר – רבי נחמיה אומר: שרת רוח הקדש על ישראל ויאמרו שירה, כבני אדם שהן קוראין את שמע. רבי עקיבה אומר: רוח הקדש שרת על ישראל, ויאמרו שירה, כבני אדם שהן קוראין את ההלל.</p>	<p>Mechilta deRabbi Yishmael, Exod. 15:1</p> <p><i>Then sang Moshe and the children of Yisra'el this song to the Lord, and they spoke, saying...</i> <i>And they spoke, saying:</i> R. Nehemia said: Descended the Holy Spirit on Israel and they recited the Song the way people recite the Sh'ma. R. Akiva said: The Holy Spirit descended on Israel and they recited the Song the way people recite the Hallel.</p>	<p>We are familiar with the first lines of the Song of the Sea. But let's pay close attention to the phrase <i>ויאמרו לאמר</i> - <i>and they spoke, saying</i>. What does that mean? Is this trying to emphasize that they <i>spoke</i> the Song, i.e. recited it, in a peculiar way? If so, in what particular way did they recite the song? In our own religious experiences, we know that some texts are recited one way, and others in other ways. Some require one kind of setting or posture, and others, require different settings or postures. Take the <i>Sh'ma</i> for example. How does one recite the <i>Sh'ma</i>? Our custom is to close our eyes and place a hand over them as we recite it. With this act, we are demonstrating our utmost concentration and intentionality as if a great truth is being revealed to us. After all, when we recite, <i>Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One</i>, we are not simply making an arithmetic statement; we are declaring the moral foundation of the universe. The spiritual posture of the <i>Sh'ma</i>, therefore, is a posture of concentration, intellectual apprehension, meditation, and contemplation. Contrast that with the Hallel. When we recite Hallel the setting is communal, we are luxuriating in the experience of communal singing. The music transports us. If it is effective, the rhythm will literally move us, and we will become one with it.</p>
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The *Sh'ma* is a *mind* experience and Hallel is a *body* experience. Or, to put it another way, the *Sh'ma* is an *intellectual* experience and the Hallel is an *emotional* experience. Or, to put it in yet another way, the *Sh'ma* is a *left-brain* (analytical and methodical) experience while the Hallel is a *right-brain* (creative or artistic) experience. Now, let's examine the debate between R. Nehemia and R. Akiva. What are they arguing about? They are not splitting hairs on an arcane picayune detail of the text. They are arguing about the content and the experience of the Song of the Sea, and by extension, they are arguing about the way we are to perceive and interpret this event. Is this an event of revelatory content? R. Nehemia would argue that yes, it was. When the text says that they *spoke* the Song, to him it signifies that at that moment they experienced a profound revelatory event (*the Holy Spirit descended on them*) and the content of that revelatory event was akin to the content of the *Sh'ma*. At the end of the Song, when it says, *יהוה ימלוך לעלם ועד* - *The Lord will reign forever* that statement is a declaration that requires utmost intentionality and concentration. For R. Akiva, the experience of singing the Song of the Sea was an experience of exaltation. Sure, it was a profound revelatory event (*the Holy Spirit descended on them*) but the reaction was an emotional reaction of unbridled song, the kind of spiritual and emotional rapture that one can only experience in communal singing. Which brings us to this question: when we recite the Song of the Sea in our daily prayers, how should we recite it? As a revelatory declaration with important intellectual content, or an experience of exaltation, with rapture and joy? Should we recite it as R. Nehemia or as R. Akiva? Both approaches have what to offer us.

Beautifying God in the World: A Single Word and its Multiple Meanings

<p>זה אלי ואניו - ואניו רבי ישמעאל אומר: וכי אפשר לבשר ודם להגות לקונו? אלא אניו לו במצוות: אעשה לפניו לולב נאה, סכה נאה, ציצית נאה, תפלה נאה.</p>	<p><i>This is my God and I will enshrine Him ve'anvehu - I will enshrine Him</i> R. Yishmael said: Is it possible for a human being <i>le-hanvot - to enshrine one's Creator?</i> Rather, (read the word <i>ve'anvehu</i> as) <i>anveh lo - I shall beautify myself to Him</i> with mitzvot — I will make a beautiful lulav before Him I will construct a beautiful sukkah, I will weave beautiful tzitzith, I will chant beautiful prayers.</p>	<p>This is a classic form of midrash in which a difficult Hebrew word can be parsed in so many different ways. It can be re-vocalized, split into two words, it can be punned with similar sounding words, etc. The difficult word here is <i>ve'anvehu</i>. The root of this word is <i>נ.ו.ה</i> - <i>n.v.h.</i> which can mean both <i>to dwell</i> and <i>to adorn</i>. This is what gives this line of poetry a lot of texture because it suggests simultaneously that <i>I want to glorify God</i> and <i>I want to give God a home</i>. And the Rabbis are divided on this. How does one <i>glorify</i> God? How does one enable God <i>to abide</i> or <i>to dwell</i> among us? R. Yishmael veers to the <i>adornment</i> sense of the word. A person doesn't <i>adorn</i> God but <i>adorns the self before God</i>. How? With beauty.</p>
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To R. Yishmael, religion summons an aesthetic impulse. Rituals and ritual objects are things of beauty. Just as a beautiful home enhances one's life and sparks joy, a beautiful religious environment glorifies God's presence and enhances the religious experience. He lists here things that are connected to the holiday of Sukkot but it could apply equally to Pesach: have a beautiful seder plate, a beautiful matzah plate, a beautiful *haggadah*, etc. Build a beautiful synagogue, adorn the scrolls with fine silver, sing lush melodies with gorgeous harmonies. All of these things, enhance the spiritual experience.

אבא שאול אומר: אָדָמָה לוֹ. מָה הוּא רַחוּם וְחַנוּן, אֲרֵי אַתָּה רַחוּם וְחַנוּן.	Abba Shaul said: <i>I will liken myself to Him.</i> Just as He is merciful and gracious, so too, should you be merciful and gracious.	To Abba Shaul you make God beautiful in the world by behaving like God. Be a beautiful person; that way you will reflect a beautiful God. Adorn yourself with godly attributes and you will be beautifying God's presence in the world.
רבי יוסה הגלילי אומר: נִינּוֹ וְשִׁבְחוּ לְהַקְבִּי ה' בְּכָנִי כָּל אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם!	R. Yosei HaGlili said: <i>Nayyenu</i> -Beautify and offer praise to the Holy One blessed be He before all the nations of the world!	There is a public dimension to the <i>beautification</i> of God. What significance does private aesthetics have? What good is having a private collection of gorgeous ritual objects? While the motives may be altruistic, the result can be potentially self-indulgent.
רבי יוסה בן דרמסקית אומר: אֶעֱשֶׂה לְפָנָיו בַּיִת מְקֻדָּשׁ נָאֵה	R. Yosei ben Drumaskit said: I will make for Him a beautiful <i>na'eh</i> temple.	YBD is the ultimate Chair of the Building Committee! What he is saying is that one ought to channel the impulse to glorify God by constructing a beautiful Temple. The Temple in Jerusalem did that.
רבי אקיבה אומר: אֲדַבֵּר בְּנֹאֲמָיו וּבְשִׁבְחֵי שְׁלָמֵי שְׁאֵמֶר וְהָיָה הָעוֹלָם בְּכָנִי כָּל אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם.	R. Akiva said: I will speak of the beauty and the praise of the <i>One who spoke</i> and the world came into being, before all the nations of the world.	It's interesting how R. Akiva takes the approach of speech. Adorning God in the world is a conversation; it requires interpretation and discourse. God spoke and brought the world into being; we then should speak to the nations of the world to enhance God's presence. And interpret Torah too.
וְחַכְמֵי אֲמָרִים: אֲלֵנּוּ עַד שְׁאֵבֵא עִמּוֹ לְבַיִת מְקֻדָּשׁוֹ.	And the Sages said: <i>alavenu</i> -I will accompany Him until I will enter with Him to His holy Temple.	Here the Sages give the most radical re-vocalization and punning on <i>anvehu</i> - they are asking us to read it as <i>alavenu</i> . That summons an image of an abiding relationship. God and Israel walking together, or the individual taking it upon himself to escort God through the world, towards the Temple.

Six Ways to Beautify God

R. Yishmael	Beautiful ritual objects.	Six different interpretations are offered here. Six answers to the question of how to enhance and glorify God's presence in the world. It's interesting to note how each one of these interpretations highlights the different proclivities people have in expressing their religious devotion. To some it is through aesthetics, to others, behavior. Some are prayerful. Others want to build beautiful structures. To some it is about a constant conversation, and to others it is through relationship. A text like this validates all of these approaches. On the other hand, it invites us to weigh in: how should we glorify God's presence in the world?
Abba Shaul	Be a beautiful person.	
R. Yosei HaGlili	Praise God in the world.	
R. Yosei ben Drumaskit	Make a beautiful Temple.	
R. Akiva	Say beautiful things.	
The Sages	Be in a beautiful relationship.	

Three Days in the Desert Without Water: A Debate and a Metaphor

וַלְכוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים בְּמִדְבָּר וְלֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם – רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֹמֵר: כְּשִׁמוּעוֹ. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אֹמֵר: וְהָלֵא הַיָּמִים תַּחַת רַגְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵיוּ...? הֲאֵ מֵה תִלְמַד לֵאמֹר "וְלֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם"? כְּדֵי לִנְעֹן. אֲחֵרִים אֹמְרִים: מַיִם שֶׁנִּשְׁלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּין הַגְּזָרִים, שְׁלָמוֹ מִהֵן בְּאוֹתָהּ שְׁעָה. הֲאֵ מֵה תִלְמַד לֵאמֹר "וְלֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם"? שְׁאֵף בְּכֻלֵּיהֶם לֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם. דּוֹרְשֵׁי רְשׁוּמוֹת אָמְרוּ: "וְלֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם", דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה שֶׁנִּמְשְׁלוּ לַמַּיִם ... לְפִי שֶׁפָּרְשׁוּ מִדְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים, לְכָף מְרֹדוֹ. וְלָכֵף הִתְקַיְּנוּ לָהֶם הַנְּבִיאִים וְהַזְּקֵנִים, שִׁיְהִיו קוֹרִין בַּתּוֹרָה בַּשַּׁבָּת, בַּשְּׁנַיִם וּבַחֲמִישֵׁי. הֲאֵ כִּיצַד? קוֹרִין בַּשַּׁבָּת, וּמְפַסְקִין בְּאַחַד בַּשַּׁבָּת, וְקוֹרִין בַּשְּׁנַיִם, וּמְפַסְקִין בַּשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבְרִבְעִי, וְקוֹרִין בַּחֲמִישִׁי, וּמְפַסְקִין בַּעֲרֵב שַׁבָּת.	And they went three days in the desert, and <i>they did not find water</i> (Exod. 15:22). R. Yehoshua said: Literally. R. Eliezer said: Wasn't there water beneath their feet? What does <i>they did not find water</i> teach us? That their faith was being tested. Others said: The water that they took with them (from water sources) between the clefts of rock (at the Sea of Reeds) ran out for them. So what does <i>they did not find water</i> teach us? That even in their vessels they could not find water. The Expounders of Metaphors said: They did not <i>find</i> words of Torah, which are compared to water...Because they separated from words of Torah for three days, they rebelled — wherefore the prophets and the elders instituted that they read in the Torah on Sabbath, Monday, and Thursday. How so? They read on Sabbath and pause on Sunday; they read on Monday and pause on Tuesday and Wednesday; they read on Thursday and pause on Friday (so that they do not go three consecutive days without reading Torah.)	Comment: Have you ever wondered why we have a weekly rhythm of Torah readings? So that we shouldn't go three days without Torah. This harkens back to the time frame immediately following the miracle at the Sea, when the Israelites first complained to Moses about their lack of water. R. Yehoshua does not see this beyond its plain sense: they were thirsty, therefore they complained. R. Eliezer: They were being tested and failed. Others say, they ran out of water which means, they were not completely unprepared, but they were also not resourceful enough to know how to find new sources of water. But all this is a metaphor. Just like you can't go three days without water, we can't go three days without Torah! Hag Sameah! Gut Yontiv! הג שמח! גת יונטיו!
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