



# What Does the FOX Say?

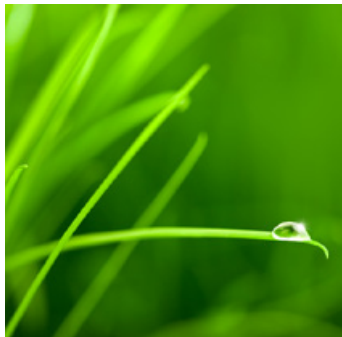
## INSIGHTS INTO PEREK SHIRA

Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

## Introduction to Perek Shira

*Perek Shira* is an ancient text whose authorship had not been definitively determined. It is popularly attributed to King David, based upon an incident described in the text's introduction, below. Others attribute it to his son, King Solomon, who understood the allegorical "language" of nature. (Still others attribute it to some of the Sages of the Mishna.) While *Perek Shira* means "A Chapter of Song," it is actually six chapters (though the division into sub-chapters appears to be a later innovation).

*Perek Shira* comprises a long series of praises to God that are "recited" by His various creations, both animate (birds, animals, etc.) and inanimate (bodies of water, day and night, etc.). There are a number of versions extant; a typical version has 84 or 85 such creations praising God. The idea underlying *Perek Shira* is that everything in God's universe has something to teach us. *Perek Shira* points us in the right direction to figure out what each creation's lesson might be.



While *Perek Shira* anthropomorphizes the wind, the grass, the Leviathan, etc., not everyone agrees that the intention of the work is that these things literally "sing" to God. Some attribute the songs to the angels of these creations. (The Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah 10:6 teaches that every single blade of grass has its own supervising angel.) Another idea is that these praises are metaphorically "sung" by us when our contemplation leads us to comprehend the lessons of these wonders of nature.

Clearly, when the introduction assures great rewards to one who "occupies himself" with *Perek Shira*, it doesn't just mean one who recites it. Rather, it refers to one who puts in the effort to better understand our Creator through His handiwork.

Jack Abramowitz  
4 Shevat, 5783

## Introduction

אמר רבי אליעזר כל העוסק בפֶּרֶק שִׁירָה בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְאוֹמְרָהּ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר אַז יִשִּׁיר מֹשֶׁה שֶׁר לֹא נֶאֱמַר אֲלֵא יִשִּׁיר לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

Rabbi Eliezer said: One who occupies himself with *Perek Shira* in this world is worthy of saying it in the Next World, as Exodus 15:1 says: “Then Moshe will sing.” It doesn’t say “he sang,” but “he will sing,” i.e., in the Next World.

אמר רבי כל העוסק בפֶּרֶק שִׁירָה בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה מְעִיד אֲנִי עָלָיו שֶׁהוּא בֶּן עוֹלָם הַבָּא וְנִצּוֹל מִיָּצָר הָרַע וּמִדִּין קָשָׁה וּמִשְׁטָן הַמְּשַׁחֵת וּמִכָּל מִיָּנִי מִזִּיקִין וּמִחֲבָלוֹ שֶׁל מְשִׁיחַ וּמִדִּינָה שֶׁל גִּיהֵנִם וְזוֹכָה לְלִמּוּד וּלְלִמַּד לְשִׁמּוֹר וְלַעֲשׂוֹת וְלִקְיִים וְתִלְמוּדוֹ מְקִיִּים בְּיָדוֹ וּמֵאָרֶץ יָמִים וְזוֹכָה לְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם הַבָּא:

Rebbi said: I testify regarding one who occupies himself with *Perek Shira* in this world that



he is a (future) resident of the Next World, he is saved from the evil inclination, from harsh judgment, from the destroying accuser, from all types of damage, from the birth pangs of the messianic era, and from the judgment of Gehinnom; he merits to learn and to teach, to observe, to perform and to fulfill, his learning endures in his hand, his days are lengthened, and he merits life in the Next World.

אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ ז"ל עַל דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ ע"ה בְּשָׁעָה שְׁסִיִּים סֹפֵר תְּהִלִּים זָחָה דַּעְתּוֹ עָלָיו. אָמַר לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יֵשׁ בְּרִיאָה שֶׁבְּרֵאתָ בְּעוֹלָמְךָ שְׁאוֹמְרֵת שִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבַּחוֹת יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנִּי בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה נִזְדַּמְנָה לוֹ צִפְרִדַּע אַחַת וְאָמְרָהּ לוֹ דָּוִד אַל תִּזְוַח דַּעְתְּךָ עָלַיךְ שֶׁאֲנִי אוֹמְרֵת שִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבַּחוֹת יוֹתֵר מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא עוֹד אֲלֵא כָּל שִׁירָה שֶׁאֲנִי אוֹמְרֵת מִמְּשַׁלֵּת עָלַיָּה שְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים מִשָּׁל שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיְדַבֵּר שְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים מִשָּׁל וַיְהִי שִׁירוֹ חֲמֵשֶׁה וְאֶלֶף וְלֹא עוֹד אֲלֵא שֶׁאֲנִי עוֹסֶקֶת בְּמִצְוָה גְּדוֹלָה וְזוֹ הִיא הַמִּצְוָה שֶׁאֲנִי עוֹסֶקֶת בָּהּ יֵשׁ בְּשִׁפְתַי הַיּוֹם מִיָּן אֶחָד שֶׁאֵין פְּרֻנְסָתוֹ כִּי אִם מִן הַיָּמִים וּבְשָׁעָה שֶׁהוּא רָעַב נוֹטְלֵנִי וְאוֹכְלֵנִי לְקִיִּים מֵהַ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר אִם רָעַב שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר הֶאֱכִילָהוּ לֶחֶם וְאִם צָמָא הִשְׁקָהוּ מַיִם כִּי גָחִלִים אֶתָּה חֲתָה עַל רֹאשׁוֹ וַיְהִי וְיִשְׁלַם לָךְ אֵל תִּקְרֵי יִשְׁלַם לָךְ אֲלֵא יִשְׁלִימָהוּ לָךְ:

The Sages said regarding King David that when he completed the book of Psalms, he was proud of himself. He said before Hashem, “Have You created any creature in Your world that recited more songs and praises than I?” Along came a frog, which said to him, “David! Don’t be so smug because I recite more songs and praises than you! Not only that, every song I recite contains 3,000 parables, as I Kings 5:12 says, ‘He recited 3,000 parables, and his songs were 1,500.’ Furthermore, I am occupied with a great mitzvah! This is the mitzvah with which I am occupied: by the edge of the sea there is a certain species whose sustenance only comes from the water. When it



hungers, it takes and eats me to fulfill what is written in Proverbs 25:21-22, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, because you will heap coals on his head and Hashem will reward you.' Don't read it as יִשְׁלַם לְךָ ("He will reward you") but rather as יִשְׁלִימֶהוּ לְךָ ("He will cause him to make peace with you").

## Chapter 1

שָׁמַיִם אוֹמְרִים: הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדָיו מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ



The Heavens say, "The Heavens speak of God's glory, and the firmament tells of His handiwork."  
(Psalms 19:2)

*Rashi explains that, of course, the Heavens don't literally speak. Rather, they give us light by day and night, causing us to recite God's praises and to thank Him for this gift.*

אֶרֶץ אוֹמֶרֶת. לְדוֹד מְזִמּוֹר לִי הָאָרֶץ  
וּמְלוֹאָה תִּבֵּל וַיֵּשְׁבֵי בָּהּ



The Earth says, "Of David, a Psalm: The Earth and everything in it are Hashem's: the world and all who dwell in it." (Psalms 24:1)

*The Radak teaches that David composed this Psalm to be recited when the Ark was brought into the Temple. (We recite it when returning the Torah to the ark on weekdays.)*

ואומר. מִכַּנֶּף הָאָרֶץ זְמֶרֶת שְׁמַעְנוּ צְבִי לְצַדִּיק

And it says, "From the end of the Earth we heard songs: 'Glory to the righteous!'"  
(Isaiah 24:16)

*The Metzudas Dovid teaches that Isaiah and his fellow prophets heard in prophecy that at the time of the redemption there will be destruction from one end of the Earth to the other. After that, there will be glory for every righteous person.*

גַּן עֵדֶן אוֹמֵר עוֹרֵי צָפוֹן וּבּוֹאֵי תִימָן הִפִּיחֵי גְנִי יִזְלוּ בְּשִׁמּוֹי יְבֹא דוֹדֵי לְגַנּוּ וַיֹּאכַל פְּרֵי מִגְדֵּי



The Garden of Eden says, "Awaken, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow upon my garden and let its spices flow! Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choice fruit." (Shir HaShirim 4:16)

*Rashi explains this verse as an allegory for the ingathering of the exiles from the lands of their dispersal. They will bring their offerings to God (their Beloved) in the Temple (His "garden").*



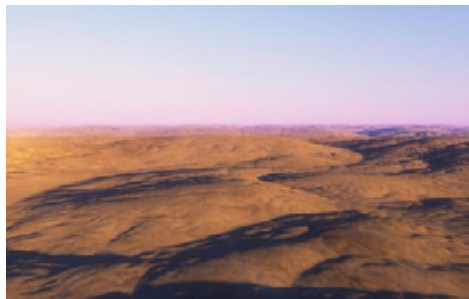
גִּיהֵנָם אֹמֵר. כִּי הַשְּׂבִיעַ נֶפֶשׁ שִׁקְקָה וְנֶפֶשׁ רָעֵבָה מְלֵא טוֹב

Gehinnom says, "Because He has satisfied the longing soul, and He has filled the hungry soul with good."  
(Psalms 107:9)

*The ibn Ezra explains that God has satisfied the longing soul with water. He contrasts this verse with Proverbs 30:16, which tells us that the Earth is never satisfied with water. This is a sign of God's kindness towards us.*



מְדַבֵּר אֹמֵר יִשְׁשׂוּם מְדַבֵּר וְצִיָּה וְתִגַּל עֲרֵבָה וְתִפְרַח כִּחֲבַצְלֵת



The wilderness says, "The wilderness and the desert will rejoice, and the plain will celebrate and blossom like the rose." (Isaiah 35:1)

*Rashi teaches that the wilderness and the desert refer to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, which will rejoice over the downfall of tyrants. The plain that will then celebrate and blossom is likewise Jerusalem.*

שְׂדוֹת אֹמְרִים !! בְּחִכְמָה יָסַד אֶרֶץ כּוֹנֵן שָׁמַיִם בְּתִבּוּנָה

The fields say, "Hashem founded the Earth with wisdom; He established the Heavens with understanding."  
(Proverbs 3:19)

*This verse discusses God's wisdom and understanding; the following verse cites His knowledge. The Talmud (Brachos 55a) points out that these three attributes, which God used to build the world, He gifted to Betzalel, the architect of the Mishkan.*



מַיִם אֹמְרִים לְקוֹל תִּתֵּנוּ הַמּוֹן מַיִם בְּשָׁמַיִם וַיַּעַל נְשָׂאִים מִקְצֵה אֶרֶץ בְּרָקִים לְמָטָר עָשָׂה וַיֵּצֵא רוּחַ מֵאֲצִרְתָּיו



The waters say, "At the sound of His giving a multitude of waters in the Heavens, He brought clouds up from the end of the Earth. He made lightning for the rain, and He sent wind out from His treasures. (Jeremiah 51:16)

*The Metzudas Dovid explains that, in order to "give voice" to the water in the atmosphere, God raises the clouds to the heights of the Heavens. When the clouds are seen on the horizon, He moves them adjacent to where He wills it to rain.*

ימים אומרים מקלות מים רבים אדירים משברי ים אדיר במרום ::

The seas say, “More than the voices of many waters, the mighty breakers of the sea, Hashem is mighty on high.” (Psalms 93:4)

*The Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah says that when the seas praised God, He said, “If the seas who cannot speak praise Me thus, how much more man – who can speak – will do so!” When man rebelled against God, He returned the sea to its previous position of dominance (i.e., in the flood).*



נהרות אומרים נהרות ימחאו כף יחד הרים ירגנו



The rivers say, “The rivers will clap hands; together, the mountains will sing!” (Psalms 98:8)

*The Malbim explains that the rivers and mountains will rejoice in the future, when God makes changes to them as He did to the Jordan (which He split when the Jews entered Israel) and the rivers of Arnon (which ran red when God saved the Jews from an ambush).*

מעינות אומרים ושרים כחללים כל מעיני בך

The fountains say, “And singers like flutists, all my thoughts are of you.” (Psalms 87:7)

*The word מעיני – literally, “my fountains” – is understood in various ways in this verse: “my thoughts,” “my innards,” etc. Rabbeinu Bachaye says that it comes from the word עין (eye) and that David is referencing Deut. 11:12, in which God says that his metaphorical “eye” is always on Israel.*



## Perek Shira – Chapter 2

יום אומר יום ליום יביע אמר ולילה ללילה יחיה דעת



The day says, “Day to day utters speech, and night to night relates knowledge.” (Psalms 19:3)

*The Midrash Tanchuma on parshas Mishpatim explains that everything in creation borrows from one another. Day borrows time from the night, and vice versa, but they don't file complaints in court as people do, as verse 19:4 continues, “There is no speech and there are no words...”*

לילה אומר להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות

The night says, “To tell of his kindness in the morning and of his faithfulness in the nights.” (Psalms 92:3)

According to Brachos 12a, this verse is the source of the practice to follow Shema with “emes v’yatziv” (“true and firm”) by day, and with “emes ve’emunah” (“true and trustworthy”) at night.



שמש אומר שמש ירח עמד זבלה לאור חציה יהלכו לנגה  
ברק חניתה



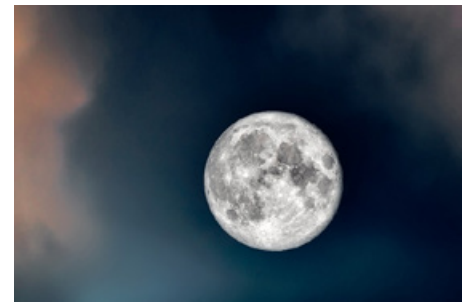
The sun says, “The sun (and) the moon stand still in their habitation; they go at the light of Your arrows, at the shining of Your glittering spear.” (Chavakuk 3:11)

The Targum Yonason explains that this refers to the battle of Gibeon (Joshua chapter 10), in which God caused the sun to stand still – a great display of His might!

ירח אומרת עשה ירח למועדים שמש ידע מבוא

The moon says, “He made the moon for the appointed times; the sun knows (the time of) its setting.” (Psalms 104:19)

The Aruch HaShulchan (OC 426:2) explains that we bless the moon more than we do the stars because of its proximity to Earth. It inspires in us a feeling for God’s greatness since its path and phases are perceptible throughout the month.



כוכבים אומרים אתה הוא !! לבדך אתה עשית את השמים שמי השמים וכל צבאם הארץ וכל  
אשר עליה הימים וכל אשר בהם ואתה מחיה את כלם וצבא השמים לה משתחווים

The stars say, “You are Hashem; You alone. You made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host; the earth, and all that is upon it; the seas, and all that is in them. You preserve them all and the host of heaven bow down to You.” (Nehemiah 9:6)



The Ralbag explains that when a human being makes something, the creation no longer requires the creator’s attention. God’s creations are not this way. As long as we exist, we rely upon Him in order to endure.



עֲבִים אוֹמְרִים יֵשֶׁת חֹשֶׁךְ סִתְרוּ סְבִיבוֹתָיו סִפְתּוֹ חֹשֶׁכֶת מִים עָבֵי שְׁחָקִים

The thick clouds say, “He made darkness His secret place, His booth around Him; the darkness of waters and thick clouds of the skies.” (Psalms 18:12)

*In parshas Bo, God tells Moshe to stretch his hand heavenward to trigger the plague of darkness. Where did this darkness come from? Shemos Rabbah cites the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, that the darkness came from this “booth” that metaphorically envelops God.*



עֲנֵי כְבוֹד אוֹמְרִים אֶף בְּרֵי יִטְרִיחַ עַב יִפְיץ עֵנַן אוֹרוֹ

The clouds of glory say, “He also burdens the thick cloud with moisture; He scatters His storm cloud.” (Job 37:11)



*The first two words of this verse in Hebrew are “af b’ri”; Rashi tells us that this is the name of the angel in charge of the clouds. (Another meaning of “af” in Hebrew is anger; another meaning of “b’ri” is health. This is indicative of the two ways God can send us rain, depending on what we deserve.)*

רוּחַ אוֹמֵר אֲמַר לְצָפוֹן תִּנְי וּלְתֵימָן אֵל תִּקְלָאֵי הִבִּיאֵי בְנֵי מִרְחוֹק וּבָנוֹתַי מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ

The wind says, “I will say to the north, ‘Give,’ and to the south, ‘Do not withhold. Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth.’” (Isaiah 43:6)

*The Talmud in Menachos (110a) says that “sons” in the verse refers to those exiled to Babylonia, while “daughters” refer to those exiled to other lands. (Babylonia was the post-exile center of Torah, and Torah-study was the occupation of sons rather than of daughters.)*





בְּרָקִים אֹמְרִים בְּרָקִים לְמָטָר עָשָׂה מוֹצֵא רוּחַ מֵאוֹצְרוֹתָיו

The lightning bolts say, “...He makes lightning bolts for the rain; He brings forth wind from his storehouses.” (Psalms 135:7)

*The Malbim explains that when God wants to make it rain, He separates electricity from the clouds in the form of lightning. Through this, He takes wind from His*

*storehouses. He separates the essence of the wind in the form of steam, making it rain. (This is a spiritual rather than a scientific description of the process.)*

טל אומר אֱהִיָּה כְּטַל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִפְרַח כְּשׁוֹשְׂנָה וְיִהְיֶה שְׂרָשָׁיו כְּלִבְנוֹן

The dew says, “I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a rose and he will spread his roots like the Lebanon.” (Hoshea 14:6)

*The Talmud in Taanis 4a says that the Jews likened their relationship with God to the rain. God replied, “I’ll do you one better! Rain is sometimes desirable, but not always. I will be to you like the dew, which is always a blessing!”*



גְּשָׁמִים אֹמְרִים גָּשֶׁם נְדָבוֹת תָּנִיף אֱלֹהִים נַחֲלֶתָּהּ וְנִלְאָה אַתָּה כּוֹנֵנֶתָּה



The rains say, “Generous rain You poured down, O God; You established Your inheritance, which was weary.” (Psalms 68:10)

*The ibn Ezra clarifies that God’s “inheritance” is the land of Israel, to which He always pays attention. When the land is metaphorically weary, God sustains it.*

### Chapter 3

אֵילָנוֹת שֶׁבַּשְׂדֵּה אֹמְרִים אֲזַ יִרְנְנוּ עַצֵּי הַיַּעַר מִלִּפְנֵי יי כִּי בָא לְשִׁפּוֹט אֶת הָאָרֶץ

The trees in the field say, “Then the trees of the forest will sing from before Hashem, because He has come to judge the earth.” (I Chronicles 16:33)

*This verse refers to “the trees of the field,” but the corresponding verse in Psalms 96:12 says “all the trees of the field.” What’s excluded? The midrash in Vayikra Rabbah explains that our verse in Chronicles refers specifically to fruit trees.*





גִּפֶן אוֹמֶרֶת כֹּה אָמַר יי כֹּאֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא הַתִּירוֹשׁ בְּאֲשָׁכּוֹל וְאָמַר אֵל תִּשְׁחִיתֶהוּ כִּי בִרְכָה בּוֹ כֵּן  
אֶעֱשֶׂה לְמַעַן עֲבָדֵי לְבִלְתִּי הַשְּׁחִית הַכֹּל



The vine says, “Thus says Hashem: As the wine is found in the cluster and one says, ‘Do not destroy it, because blessing is in it,’ so shall I do for the sake of My servants, in order not to destroy everything.” (Isaiah 65:8)

*Targum Yonason explains that “the cluster” refers to the generation of the flood, and “the wine” is Noah, the righteous man who was saved. Just as God spared Noah in order to rebuild the world, so He will do for His righteous servants.*

תְּאֵנָה אוֹמֶרֶת נֹצֵר תְּאֵנָה יֹאכַל פְּרִיָּהּ

The fig tree says, “The one who guards the fig tree will eat her fruits.” (Proverbs 27:18)

*The Talmud in Eiruvim (54a-b) asks why the Torah is compared to a fig tree. Based on this verse, it answers that just as one can always find figs when searching a fig tree, one who contemplates Torah matters will always find new meaning in them.*



רִמּוֹן אוֹמֵר כְּפֶלַח הָרִמּוֹן רִקְתָּהּ מִבְּעַד לְצַמְתָּהּ

The pomegranate says, “Your temple is like a pomegranate split open behind your veil.” (Shir HaShirim 4:3)



*Rashi explains that in Talmudic idiom, the temples are called “the pomegranate of the face.” In its simple meaning, this verse seems to be praising a woman’s beauty. Metaphorically, however, the word רִקְתָּהּ suggests רִיקָנִים – “empty” people. Even the emptiest of us, we are told, is as full of mitzvos as a pomegranate is full of seeds.*

## תָּמַר אֹמֵר צְדִיק כְּתָמַר יֶפֶרַח כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה

The date palm says, “The righteous will flourish like the palm tree; they will grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” (Psalms 92:13)

*The gemara in Taanis (25a-b) asks why the righteous are compared both to a palm tree and to a cedar. It answers that you shouldn't think that the righteous don't grow back when cut (like a date palm), so it adds the cedar. Similarly, you shouldn't think that the righteous are fruitless (like a cedar), therefore it adds the date palm.*



## תְּפֹחַת אֹמֵר כְּתֵפוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הַיַּעַר כֵּן דֹדֵי בֵּין הַבָּנִים בְּצִלוֹ חֲמֻדָּתִי וְיִשְׁבְּתִי וּפְרִיּוֹ מִתּוֹק לְחֵכֵי



The apple tree says, “Like the apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the youths. I delighted to sit in his shade, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” (Shir HaShirim 2:3)

*The midrash in Shir HaShirim Rabbah gives several reasons Israel is compared to an apple: an apple tree produces blossoms before leaves and the Jews put naaseh (“we will do”) before nishma (“we will hear”); apples ripen in the month of Sivan and the Jews*

*“ripened” in Sivan (when the Torah was given); apples take 50 days to ripen, as did the Jews (it was 50 days from the Exodus to Sinai).*

## שְׂבֵלֹת חֲטִיִּם אֹמְרֹת שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת מִמַּעַמְקִים קְרָאתֶיךָ !!

The sheaves of wheat say, “A song of the ascents: From the depths I called to You, Hashem.” (Psalms 130:1)

*A person may not stand on something high like a bed, a bench or a chair when he prays; rather, one must pray from a low spot, as it says, “From the depths I called to You, Hashem” (Machzor Vitry, Hilchos Shabbos, based on Brachos 10b).*



שְׂבֵלֹת שְׁעוּרִים אוֹמְרֵת תְּפִלָּה לְעַנִּי כִי יַעֲטֹף וְלִפְנֵי יי יִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׁיחוֹ



The sheaves of barley say, “A prayer of a poor person, when he wraps himself and pours out his speech before Hashem.” (Psalms 102:1)

*The Radak explains that this psalm was written as if recited by the exiles of Babylonia, Persia and Media, who were in great distress. One who prays from such distress bends down, wrapping himself up in his limbs (perhaps by curling into a fetal position).*

שָׂאֵר שְׂבוּלִים אוֹמְרִים לְבָשׁוּ כָרִים הַצֵּאן וְעַמְקִים יַעֲטֹפוּ בָר יִתְרוֹעְעוּ אֶף יִשִּׁירוּ

Other sheaves say, “The meadows are clothed with flocks and the valleys are wrapped with grain. They shout joy joyfully; they also sing.” (Psalms 65:14)

*Rav Kook writes that shemittah (the sabbatical year) and yoveil (the Jubilee year) will adorn the land of Israel, which will respond by granting the people all the spiritual treasure that it contains, commensurate with the joy of shemittah and yoveil (Shabbat Ha’aretz).*



יְרֻקוֹת שְׂבִשְׂדָה אוֹמְרִים תִּלְמִיָּה רִוּה נַחַת גְּדוּדָה בְּרַב־יָבִים תִּמְגַּגְנָה צְמַחָה תִּבְרָךְ



The vegetables in the field say, “You water its furrows, You level its ridges, You soften it with showers; You bless its growth.” (Psalms 65:11)

*What happens if the Jews are found lacking on Rosh Hashana, causing God to issue an irrevocable decree for a year of scant rain, but they later repent? According to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashana 1:3), this verse reflects God’s “plan B” so that He may provide for us without “reversing” Himself.*





דְּשָׂאִים אוֹמְרִים יְהִי כְבוֹד יי לְעוֹלָם יִשְׂמַח יי בְּמַעֲשָׂיו

The grasses say, “The glory of Hashem will endure forever; Hashem will rejoice in his works.” (Psalms 104:31)

*The Malbim says that if humans lived forever, God’s glory as Creator would not be so evident, as people would consider themselves to be self-existent. Since generations come and go, people recognize their Creator and honor Him. Hashem therefore rejoices in His works, which are eternal.*

## Chapter 4

תְּרַנְגוּל אוֹמֵר בְּשִׁעָה שְׁבָא הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶצֶל הַצְּדִיקִים בְּגֵן עֵדֶן זוֹלְפִים כָּל אֵילָנֵי גֵן עֵדֶן בְּשָׂמִים וּמְרַנְּנִים וּמְשַׁבְּחִים וְאֵז גַּם הוּא מְתַעַרֵר וּמְשַׁבַּח

The rooster says, “When the Holy One Blessed Be He comes to the righteous in the Garden of Eden, all the trees in the Garden of Eden scatter their spices, they rejoice and they praise, then He, also, is stirred and praises.” (Zohar, Parshas Vayakhel)

*HaSulam, a commentary on the Zohar by Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (d. 1954), explains that the “trees” in the Garden of Eden are in fact the souls of the righteous.*



בְּקוֹל רֵאשׁוֹן אוֹמֵר זֶה דוֹר דִּרְשׁוּ מִבְּקִשֵׁי פְּנֵיךָ יַעֲקֹב סֵלָה שְׂאוּ שְׁעָרִים רֵאשִׁיכֶם וְהַנְּשָׂאוּ פְתָחֵי עוֹלָם וַיְבוֹא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד מִי זֶה מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד יי עֲזֹז וְגִבּוֹר יי גִּבּוֹר מִלְחָמָה



In its first call it says, “This is the generation of those who seek Him; (the children of) Yaakov who seek Your presence, selah! Gates, raise your heads! Everlasting doors be raised and the King of Glory will come in. Who is this King of Glory? Hashem, strong and mighty; Hashem mighty in battle!” (Psalms 24:6-8)

*The ibn Ezra says that this is an allusion to the generation that built the Temple after David’s death and then returned to God’s presence; this is the generation that seeks Him. (He also explains that “selah” here means “in truth.”)*

בְּקוֹל שְׁנֵי אֹמְרֵי שַׁעֲרִים רָאשֵׁיכֶם וּשְׂאוּ פְתָחֵי עוֹלָם וַיִּבֹא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד מִי הוּא זֶה מֶלֶךְ  
הַכְּבוֹד !! צְבֹאוֹת הוּא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד סְלָה

In its second call it says, “Gates, raise your heads!  
Everlasting doors be raised and the King of Glory will  
come in. Who is He, this King of Glory? The Lord of  
Hosts – He is the King of Glory, selah!” (Psalms 24:9-10)

*The Metzudas Dovid explains the duplication of verses.  
The early verses refer to the first Temple, as we have  
said. Our verses here refer to the future third Temple.  
The second Temple is not represented because the  
Shechinah (God’s “Presence”) did not rest there.*



בְּקוֹל שְׁלִישֵׁי אֹמְרֵי עֲמֻדוֹ צְדִיקִים וְעֹסְקוּ בַּתּוֹרָה כְּדֵי שְׂיִהְיֶה שְׂכָרְכֶם כְּפוּל לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא



In its third call it says, “Stand, you righteous, and  
occupy yourselves with Torah in order that your  
reward in the Next World will be doubled.”

*The Ramban (Shaar HaG’mul 33) says that some  
people simply occupy themselves with Torah and  
mitzvos. Such people have only merits and do not  
warrant any Divine punishment whatsoever.*

בְּקוֹל רְבִיעֵי אֹמְרֵי לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קוֹיֵתִי !!

In its fourth call it says, “I have hoped for your salvation, Hashem.” (Genesis 49:18)

*This is part of Yaakov’s blessing to the Tribe of Dan,  
which immediately prior foretold the coming of Samson.  
The Daas Z’keinim explains that when Yaakov had his  
prophecy regarding Samson, he had to clarify that  
Israel’s salvation would be brought about not by a  
warrior but by God Himself.*







### בְּקוֹל חֲמִישִׁי אוֹמֵר עַד מָתִי עָצַל תִּשְׁכַּב מָתִי תִקּוּם מִשְׁנֹתֶךָ

In its fifth call it says, “How long will you laze, you sluggard? When will you arise from your slumber?” (Proverbs 6:9)

*Orchos Tzaddikim explains that a lazy person has a weak character and he makes excuses to avoid studying Torah. No matter how easy we might make it for him, he'll always find an excuse.*

### בְּקוֹל שִׁישִׁי אוֹמֵר אֵל תִּאָּהֵב שְׁנָה פֶּן תִּזְרַשׁ פִּקְח עֵינֶיךָ שִׁבַּע לֶחֶם

In its sixth call it says, “Do not love sleep, lest you come become impoverished. Open your eyes and you will be satisfied with bread!” (Proverbs 20:13)

*The Malbim, in his Biur HaMilos (Explanation of the Words), demonstrates that פִּקְח, the word for opening in this verse, refers not to the eyes we use for seeing, but rather to the “eyes” of one’s mind.*



### בְּקוֹל שְׁבִיעִי אוֹמֵר עַת לַעֲשׂוֹת לַיְי הִפְרוּ תוֹרָתְךָ

In its seventh call it says, “It is time to act for Hashem; they have nullified Your Torah.” (Psalms 119:126)



*The Talmud in Gittin (60a) explains that writing down the Oral Law used to be prohibited; this rendered it in danger of being lost. The Sages overturned that law because sometimes one has to “nullify the Torah” for the sake of Hashem. (Please note that individuals do not have to authority to make such calls; this is a power limited to our Torah leaders in the most pressing of circumstances.)*

### תִּרְנַגְלַת אוֹמֶרֶת נִתַּן לָחֶם לְכָל בְּשָׂר כִּי לַעוֹלָם חֶסֶדּוֹ

The hen says, “He gives bread to all flesh because His lovingkindness lasts forever.” (Psalms 136:25)

*The Chofetz Chaim says, in Shmiras HaLashon (Shaar HaTorah 5:14), that sometimes people don’t want their daughters to marry Torah scholars from fear of poverty. He counters, based on this verse, that such thinking is incorrect. If God feeds all His creatures, would he let students of Torah starve? (Certainly not!)*



יוֹנָה אוֹמֶרֶת כְּסוֹס עֶגוּר כֵּן אֶצְפָּצֵף אֶהְגֶּה כִּיּוֹנָה דָלוּ עֵינַי לְמָרוֹם אֲדַנִּי עֲשֵׂקָה לִי עֶרְבִנִי



The dove says, “Like a swallow and a crane, so do I chatter; I moan like a dove. My eyes fail looking upward. My Master, I am oppressed; pledge Yourself to me.” (Isaiah 38:14)

*Midrash Tehillim (119:30) explains the final clause of this verse. What does it mean to have God as one’s guarantor? “That I will not descend to Gehinnom. If You can’t pledge Yourself to me, who can?”*

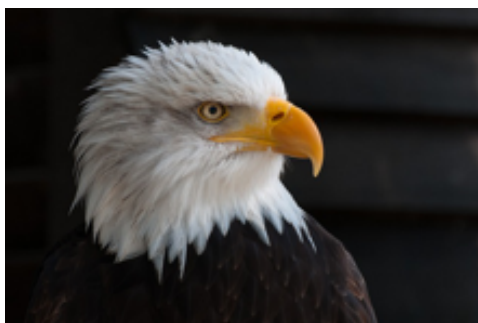
אוֹמֶרֶת יוֹנָה לִפְנֵי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם יְהִיוּ מְזוֹנוֹתַי מְרוּרִים כְּזֵית בְּיַדְךָ וְאֵל יְהִיוּ מְתוֹקִים כְּדָבֶשׁ עַל יְדֵי בֶשֶׂר וְדָם

The dove says before the Holy One, Blessed be He, “Master of the World! May my sustenance be as bitter as an olive through Your Hand and not sweet as honey through flesh and blood.” (Eiruvין 18b and Sanhedrin 108b)



*In II Samuel 24:14 – which we recite as part of Tachanun – David expresses a similar thought: “Let us fall into the hand of Hashem because His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hand of man.” Good or bad, we’d rather it come from Hashem!*

נָשָׂר אוֹמֵר וְאַתָּה יי אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַקִּיצָה לְפָקֵד כָּל הַגּוֹיִם אֵל תַּחֲנוּן כָּל בְּגֵדֵי אֶזְרוֹן סֵלָה



The eagle says, “And you, Hashem, God of Hosts, God of Israel, awaken to punish all the nations, do not favor all sinful traitors, selah!” (Psalms 59:6)

*Midrash Tehillim on this verse explains that God makes Himself appear to be “sleeping” in this world, which is why Israel has not yet been redeemed. In the future, however, in the end times, God will “wake” Himself to judge the nations. David prays that, at that time, He not show favor to the villainous.*

עגור אומר הודו ליי בכנור בנבל עשור זמרו לו

The crane says, "Give thanks to Hashem on the lyre; sing to Him with the ten-stringed harp." (Psalms 33:2)

*Rashi understands עשור בנבל not to mean a ten-stringed harp per se, but rather that we should praise Hashem with ten different types of melodies!*



צפור אומר גם צפור מצאה בית ודרור קן לה אשר שטה אפרחיה את מזבחותיהּ !! צבאות מלכי ואלהי



The sparrow says, "Also the sparrow has found her home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she placed her chicks – Your altars, Lord of Hosts, my King and my God." (Psalms 84:4)

*Why are birds roosting on God's altar? Rav Yonason Eibenschutz explains in Yaaros Devash (I 9:7) that all birds aspire to be pigeons and doves – the only species of bird that are fit to offer as sacrifices to Hashem.*

סנונית אומרת למען יזמרה כבוד ולא ידם !! אלהי לעולם אודך

The swallow says, "In order that my soul shall praise You and not be silent, Hashem my God, I will thank You forever." (Psalms 30:13)

*The text says kavod (honor) but translations almost universally render it "my soul." As the Radak explains, kavod refers to the soul. (Verse 10 of this psalm says "Can dust praise You?" precluding the body. The soul, however, can and does praise Hashem.)*



טסית אומרת עזרי מעם !! עשה שמים וארץ

The swift (Apus apus) says, "My help is from Hashem, Maker of Heaven and Earth." (Psalms 121:2)

*The midrash in Bereishis Rabbah (68:2) attributes this verse to Yaakov Avinu. When Eliezer sought a wife for Yitzchak, he led a caravan bearing treasure; Yaakov arrived emptyhanded but undiscouraged, fully aware that his assistance ultimately comes from God.*



צִיָּה אוֹמֶרֶת אוֹר זָרַע לְצַדִּיק וְלִישָׁרֵי לֵב שְׂמֵחָה



The storm petrel says: “Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart.” (Psalms 97:11)

*Rashi explains that this verse means “sown” literally. When you plant something, you’re preparing it to sprout and grow. That’s the case with light for the righteous and joy for the upright: they’re ready to burst forth and multiply!*

רָצַפִּי אוֹמֵר נְחֻמוּ נְחֻמוּ עַמִּי יֹאמֵר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

The laughing dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*) says, “Comfort, comfort My people, says your God.” (Isaiah 40:1)

*Eicha Rabbah (1:23) teaches that the Jews sinned doubly (“Jerusalem has sinned a sin” – Eicha 1:8) and were punished doubly (“[I]t has received ... double for all its sins” – Isaiah 40:2). Accordingly, this verse tells us that they were likewise comforted doubly.*



חֲסִידָה אוֹמֶרֶת דְּבָרוּ עַל לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַם וְקִרְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ כִּי מָלְאָה צָבָאָה כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנָהּ כִּי לָקְחָה מִיַּד  
כָּפָלִים בְּכָל חַטָּאתֶיהָ



The stork says, “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her because her host has become full, because her iniquity has been pardoned, because she has taken from Hashem’s hand double for all her sins.” (Isaiah 40:2)

*The Ran questions this verse: we talk about God’s mercy all the time, so how can we say that God punished the Jews doubly? He answers that it’s like a father punishing his son; he never punishes as much as the son really deserves, but he still feels like he punished him too much (Drashos HaRan 9:15).*



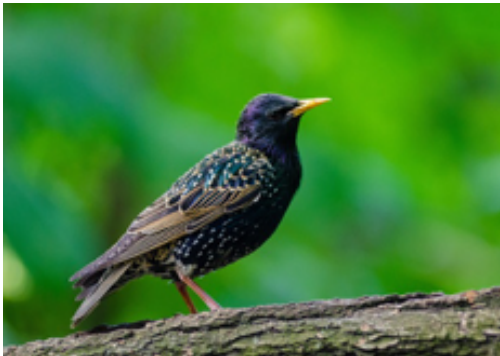
עֹרֵב אֹמֵר מִי יִכִּין לְעֵרֵב צִידוֹ כִּי יִלְדִּיו אֵל אֵל יִשְׁעוּ:

The raven says, “Who prepares food for the raven, when his young ones cry out to God?” (Job 38:41)

*The Malbim explains that God’s providence even extends to the raven, which is generally considered one of nature’s nastier creatures. He cites the Midrash Tanchuma that male ravens hate their offspring, but God ensures that they are fed.*



זָרְזִיר אֹמֵר נֹדַע בְּגוֹיִם זָרָעַם וְצִאֲצָאֵיהֶם בְּתוֹךְ הָעַמִּים כֹּל רְאִיֵּיהֶם יִכִּירוּם כִּי הֵם זָרַע בְּרַךְ !!



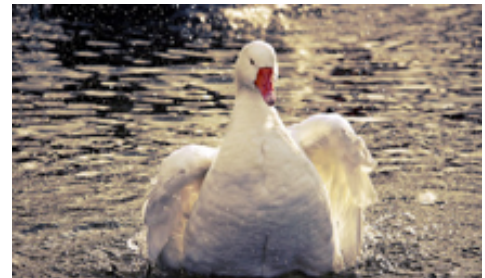
The starling says, “Their seed will be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will recognize them, that they are the seed that Hashem has blessed.” (Isaiah 61:9)

*The Radak clarifies what it means to be known among the nations: when the Jews travel abroad, whether for business or pleasure, they will be recognized and afforded great honor. The peoples will proclaim, “These are the progeny whom God has blessed!”*

אִזְ שְׁבִיבִית אֹמֶרֶת הוֹדוּ לִי קְרָאוּ בְשֵׁמוֹ הוֹדִיעוּ בְּעַמִּים עֲלִילוֹתַי שִׁירוּ לוֹ זַמְרוּ לוֹ שִׁחוּ בְּכָל נַפְלְאוֹתַי

The domestic goose says, “Give thanks to Hashem, call in His Name, make His deeds known among the peoples, sing to Him, make music to Him, speak of all His wonders.” (Psalms 105:1-2)

*The ibn Ezra tells us how all these various types of praises are to be made. “Sing to Him” – by mouth. “Make music to Him” – on the harp. “Speak of all His wonders” – to other people.*







אִז הָבַר הַמְשׁוֹטֶטֶת בַּמִּדְבָּר כְּשֶׁרָאָה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל  
עוֹסְקִים בַּתּוֹרָה אוֹמְרֵת קוֹל קוֹרָא בַּמִּדְבָּר פָּנּוּ דְרֹךְ יי  
יִשְׂרָוּ בַּעֲרֵבָה מְסֻלָּה לְאַלְהֵינוּ וְעַל מְצִיאוֹת מְזוֹנוֹתֶיהָ  
בַּמִּדְבָּר אוֹמְרֵת אֲרוּר הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בְּאָדָם בְּרוּךְ  
הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בַּיְיָ וְהָיָה יי מְבֹטָח

The wild goose flying in the wilderness, when it sees Israel occupying themselves with Torah, says, “A voice cries, ‘Prepare the way of Hashem in the wilderness; straighten a path in the desert for our God’” (Isaiah 40:3). Upon finding its food in the wilderness, it says, “Cursed is the person who trusts in human beings... Blessed is the person who trusts in Hashem; Hashem will be his assurance.” (Jeremiah 17:5, 7)

*Rashi explains that the voice calling is the ruach hakodesh, God’s “spirit” of inspiration. The path to be cleared is for the exiles to return to Jerusalem.*

*The Shulchan Aruch teaches that if someone who doesn’t need tzedaka takes it, he will eventually need tzedaka for real. One who really needs tzedaka to live but refuses it is culpable for the loss of his own life. One who could use assistance but prefers to live a humble life, however, will some day be able to assist others as per our verse, “Blessed is the person who trusts in Hashem.” (Yoreh Deah 255:2)*

פְּרוּגִיּוֹת אוֹמְרִים בְּטַח בַּיְיָ עַד כִּי בִיָּה יי צוֹר עוֹלָמִים

Ducks say, “Trust in Hashem forever, because in God Hashem is eternal strength.” (Isaiah 26:6)

*The words tzur olamim can be translated many ways: “rock of ages,” “rock of eternity,” “strength of worlds,” etc. The Malbim understands it to mean that God is the strength of all worlds because all worlds rely on Him merely to exist, let alone to thrive. The result is that God’s might rules over everything.*





רַחֲמָה אֹמֶרֶת אֲשֶׁר קָהָה לָהֶם וְאֶקְבְּצֵם כִּי פְדִיתִים וְרַבּוּ כְמוֹ רַבּוּ

The bee-eater (family Meropidae) says: “I will whistle to them and gather them, because I have redeemed them. They will increase as they (previously) increased.” (Zechariah 10:8)

The prayer Tikanta Shabbos (in the Shabbos musaf) is according to alef-beis, but backwards: תִּשְׂרִיק צַפְעִיִּים נִמְלִיךְ יִטְחִיז וְהִדִּיג בִּיא. Each phrase corresponds to a different Biblical reference. The Aruch HaShulchan (OC 286:2) tells us that the phrase תִּשְׂרִיק (whistle) is a reference to our verse, in which God summons us to return.

צִפְרֹת כְּרָמִים אֹמֶרֶת אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יָבֵא עֲזָרִי

The grasshopper says: “I lift my eyes towards the mountains; from where will my help come?” (Psalms 121:1)

The Radak explains: “If I raise my eyes to the mountains, it won’t do me any good because the only help is from God; to Him I will lift my eyes because He will help us and gather us from the nations. He made Heaven and Earth, and it is within His ability to do whatever He desires.”



חֲסִיל אֹמֵר יי אֱלֹהֵי אֲתָה אֲרוֹמְמֶךָ אוֹדָה שְׂמֶךָ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ פְּלֵא עֲצוֹת מְרַחוֹק אֲמוֹנָה אֱמֵן



The locust says, “Hashem, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will praise Your Name, because You have performed wonders – counsels from afar, enduring faith.” (Isaiah 25:1)

According to Rashi, the “counsels from afar” refer to those made long ago, specifically the ones that God made to Avraham at the Covenant Between the Parts.

שְׂמֵמִית אֹמֶרֶת הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי שְׂמֵעַ הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה

The spider says, “Praise Him with loud cymbals! Praise Him with crashing cymbals!” (Psalms 150:5)

Why should we praise Hashem with cymbals? As Rav Hirsch explains, they’re real attention-getters. When a musician crashes a pair of cymbals, people notice!



זָבֹב אֹמֵר בְּשָׁעָה שְׁאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹסְקִים בַּתּוֹרָה קוֹל אֹמֵר קָרָא וְאָמַר מָה אֶקְרָא כָּל הַבָּשָׂר חֲצִיר  
וְכָל חֲסֵדוֹ כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִבֶּשׂ חֲצִיר נָבֵל צִיץ כִּי רוּחַ יי נִשְׁבָּה בּוֹ אֲכַן חֲצִיר הָעָם יִבֶּשׂ חֲצִיר נָבֵל צִיץ  
וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְקוּם לְעוֹלָם



The fly, when Israel does not occupy itself with Torah, says, “A voice said, ‘Call out.’ And he said, ‘What shall I call out?’ ‘All flesh is grass, and all its kindness is like the flower of the field. The grass will wither, the flower will wilt, because a wind from Hashem has blown on it. Behold, the people is grass! The grass will dry out, the flower will wilt, and the word of our God will endure forever.” (Isaiah 40:6-8)

*Why should kindness wilt? Mesillas Yesarim explains that this refers to acts of kindness that people perform for their own sakes rather than altruistically. They don't have pure intentions and they seek neither to glorify God nor to redeem Israel through their deeds.*

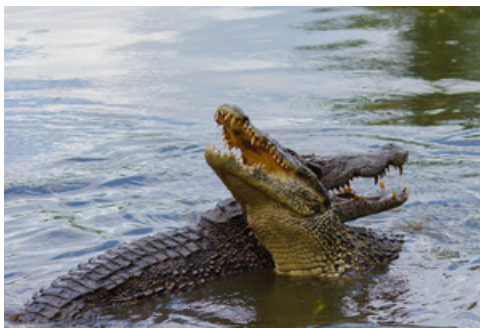
בּוֹרָא נִיב שְׁפָתַיִם שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם לְרַחוּק וְלִקְרוֹב אָמַר יי וַיְרַפְּאֵתוֹ

(The fly continues,) “I will create a new expression of the lips: Peace, peace for the one who is far and for the one who is near, says Hashem, and I will heal him.” (Isaiah 57:19)

*The Talmud in Sanhedrin (99a) infers the greatness of baalei teshuvah from this verse. We see that God first extends peace to those who used to be far from Him; only after that does He extend it to those who were always near.*



תְּנִינִים אֹמְרִים הִלְלוּ אֶת יי מִן הָאָרֶץ תְּנִינִים וְכָל תְּהוֹמוֹת



The great sea creatures say, “Praise Hashem from the land, sea monsters and all the depths.” (Psalms 148:7)

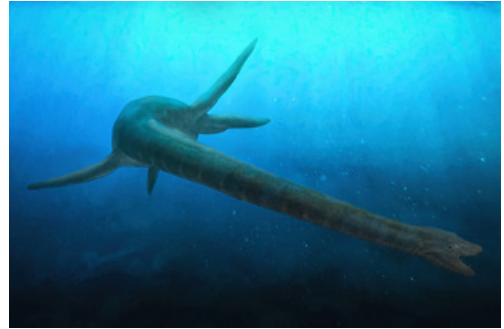
*The Rambam in his Mishneh Torah explains that our environment is not sentient, so don't misunderstand this verse to be David calling upon the depths to praise God. Rather, we should praise God when we see the might of His handiwork! (Yesodei HaTorah 3:11)*



לִיְיָ אֱמֹר הוֹדוּ לִי כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ

The Leviathan says, “Give thanks to Hashem because He is good, because His kindness endures forever.” (Psalms 136:1)

*The Malbim explains that, after instructing us to rejoice and to bless, David now tells us to give thanks to Hashem for the goodness that we receive from Him. This goodness is His kindness, which lasts forever. This is so regardless of whether He is currently running the world according to the rules of “nature” or in a more miraculous fashion.*



דְּגִים אֹמְרִים קוֹל יְיָ עַל הַמַּיִם אֵל הַכְּבוֹד הַרְעִים יְיָ עַל מַיִם רַבִּים



Fish say, “The voice of Hashem is upon the waters, the God of glory thunders, Hashem is upon many waters.” (Psalms 29:3)

*According to the Talmud (Brachos 28b), the original eighteen brachos in Shemoneh Esrei were instituted corresponding to the eighteen occurrences of “Hashem” in this Psalm. The nineteenth bracha, which was added later, was instituted corresponding to the one occurrence of “God,” in this verse.*

צְפַרְדֵּי אֹמְרֵת בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

The frog says, “Blessed is the Name of the One Whose glorious kingdom is everlasting.”

*The Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 2:25) teaches that when Moshe visited Heaven to receive the Torah, he heard the angels singing this praise, which he then taught to the Jews. The practice became to recite it quietly so as not to flaunt our “stolen” praise. The exception is Yom Kippur, when the Jews themselves are considered angelic.*



## Chapter 5

בְּהֵמָה דַּקָּה טְהוֹרָה אוֹמֶרֶת מִי כְמוֹתָ בְּאֵלִים יי מִי כְמוֹתָ נֶאֱדָר בְּקִדְּשׁ נֹרָא תְהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פְּלֵא

The small animal (like the sheep and the goat) says, “Who is like You among the mighty, Hashem? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praise, performing wonders!” (Exodus 15:11)

*The Talmud in Gittin suggests that “Who is like You among the mighty (eilim)” could also be read as “Who is like You among the silent (ilmim).” This is because God hears the abuse directed at Him by blasphemers but remains silent.*



בְּהֵמָה גְּסָה טְהוֹרָה אוֹמֶרֶת הֶרְנִינוּ לְאֱלֹהִים עוֹזְנֵנו הֶרְיעוּ לְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב



The large animal (like the cow) says, “Rejoice to God, our strength; sound a trumpet to the God of Yaakov!” (Psalms 81:2)

*This psalm is the Song of the Day for Thursday. It was so instituted because birds and fish were created on Thursday to praise God, as per Talmud Rosh Hashana 31a.*

בְּהֵמָה דַּקָּה טְמֵאָה אוֹמֶרֶת הֵיטִיבָה יי לְטוֹבִים וְלִישָׁרִים בְּלִבּוֹתֶם

The small unclean animal (i.e., the pig) says, “Do good, Hashem, to the good, and to the upright in their hearts.” (Psalms 125:4)

*The ibn Ezra explains the importance of being upright in one’s heart: a person’s words and deeds are like a building, but the honesty of one’s heart is like its foundation.*



בְּהֵמָה גְּסָה טְמֵאָה אוֹמֶרֶת יְגִיעַ כְּפִיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרִיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ

The large unclean animal (i.e., a beast of burden) says, “When you eat the work of your hands, you are fortunate and it is good for you.” (Psalms 128:2)



*The Talmud in Brachos 8a says that it’s better to be a hard worker than to be pious. Psalm 112 tells us that a pious person is fortunate, but Psalm 128 tells us that one who enjoys the fruits of his own labors is not only fortunate (in this world) but also that things will be good for him (in the Next World).*



גַּמַּל אוֹמֵר יי מְמָרוֹם יִשְׁאָג וּמִמְעוֹן קִדְשׁוֹ יִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ שְׂאֵג יִשְׁאָג עַל נְהוּוֹ:

The camel says, “Hashem will roar from on high and from His holy habitation He will give His voice. He shall roar over His abode.” (Jeremiah 25:30)

*The Metzudas Dovid explains that roaring over His abode is a clarification of God roaring from His habitation. Specifically, He is lamenting the necessary decree to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple.*



סוֹס אוֹמֵר הִנֵּה כְּעֵינֵי עֲבָדִים אֶל יַד אֲדוֹנֵיהֶם כְּעֵינֵי שִׁפְחָה אֶל יַד גְּבֻרָתָהּ כֵּן עֵינֵינוּ אֶל יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
עַד שְׂיִחְנֵנוּ



The horse says, “Behold, like the eyes of the servants to the hand of their master, like the eyes of the maid to the hand of her mistress, so are our eyes to Hashem our God until He favors us.” (Psalms 123:2)

*Based on this verse, the Mishneh Torah (Hilchos Avadim 9:8) codifies as law that a person should not overburden even his Canaanite servants. One should allow his servants to eat all the same food that he*

*himself eats, and he should let his servants eat first.*

פָּרָד אוֹמֵר יוֹדוּךָ יי כָּל מַלְכֵי אֶרֶץ כִּי שָׁמְעוּ אִמְרֵי פִיךָ

The mule says, “All the kings of the earth will acknowledge You, Hashem, because they have heard the utterances of Your mouth.” (Psalms 138:4)

*Midrash Shocher Tov explains that a human king has all sorts of counts, dukes and viceroys to assist him in ruling his kingdom, in exchange for which they receive a share of the honor that would otherwise be the king's alone. This is not the case with God; He rules alone and therefore only He should be praised,*



חֲמוֹר אוֹמֵר לְךָ ייִ הַגְדֵּלָה וְהַגְבוּרָה וְהַתְפָּאֶרֶת וְהַנִּצַּח וְהַהוֹד כִּי כָל בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ לְךָ ייִ  
הַמַּמְלָכָה וְהַמִּתְנַשֵּׂא לְכָל לְרֹאשׁ



The donkey says, “Yours, Hashem, is the greatness, the might, the splendor, the victory and the glory, because everything in Heaven and on Earth (is Yours). Yours, Hashem, is the kingship and You are the One exalted over everything.”  
(I Chronicles 29:11)

*This verse quotes King David. According to the Radak, David is saying that all the greatness, all the might, all the military victory and all the splendor that he achieved are really God’s, because all these things came from Him. Similarly, all the wealth that David acquired in battle and dedicated to God was really God’s anyway.*

שׁוֹר אוֹמֵר אֶזְ יִשִּׁיר מִשָּׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לֵי ייִ וַיֹּאמְרוּ יֹאמֵר אֲשִׁירָה לֵי ייִ כִּי גָאָה  
גָּאָה סוֹס וּרְכָבוֹ רָמָה בָּיִם

The ox says, “Then Moshe and the children of Israel sang this song to Hashem. They said, saying, ‘I will sing to Hashem because He is extremely exalted; He has thrown the horse and its rider into the sea.’” (Exodus 15:1)

*The Mishna in Sotah (5:4) points out that the word “saying” in “they said, saying” is superfluous. So why does it say “saying”? This teaches that Moshe would sing a line and the people would repeat it, responsively, the same as we do when reciting Hallel.*



חַיֹּת הַשָּׂדֶה אוֹמְרִים בְּרוּךְ הַטּוֹב וְהַמְטִיב



The animals of the field say, “Blessed is the One Who is good and Who does good.”

*Proverbs 25:25 says, “Cold water to a weary soul and good news from a distant land.” What do these things have in common? Bereishis Rabbah (57) explains that just as we recite HaTov v’haMeitiv – the blessing that God is good and does good – over good news, so too we recite it over much-needed rain.*

צְבִי אוֹמֵר וְאֲנִי אֲשִׁיר עֶזְרָה וְאֶרְנֵן לְבַקֵּר חֶסֶדְךָ כִּי הֵייתָ מְשֻׁבָּב לִי וּמְנוּס בַּיּוֹם צָר לִי

The deer says, “I will sing of Your strength; I will rejoice in Your kindness in the morning, because You were a haven to me, and a refuge on the day of my oppression.” (Psalms 59:17)

*According to the Midrash in Shemos Rabbah (23), this refers to future events. “I will sing” of God’s strength over Edom (i.e., Rome), and “I will rejoice” in God’s kindness towards us in the war of Gog and Magog (which may precede the messianic era).*



פִּיל אוֹמֵר מֵה גָדְלוֹ מֵעֲשִׂיךָ יי מֵאֵד עֲמֻקּוֹ מִחֲשַׁבְתֶּיךָ

The elephant says, “How great are Your works, Hashem; Your designs are extremely profound.” (Psalms 92:6)

*According to the Malbim, God’s extremely profound designs refers to the way He runs the world with providence, making it look like “nature.” This gives people free will so that they can be held responsible for their actions. (If God’s influence were too obvious, such as instant punishment for misdeeds, people would have no real choices.)*

אֲרִיֵה אוֹמֵר יי כְּגִבּוֹר יֵצֵא כְּאִישׁ מִלְחָמוֹת יַעִיר קִנְיָהּ יִרְעֵ אֶף יִצְרִיחַ עַל אֵיבָיו יִתְגַּבֵּר

The lion says, “Hashem will go out as a mighty man, like a man of war He will arouse zeal. He will shout – He will even roar. He will prevail over His enemies.” (Isaiah 42:13)

*Avos d’Rabbi Nosson (chapter 2) explains that God’s “roar” isn’t really like that of a warrior. Really, it exceeds the combined roars of all the warriors in the world. However, the prophets restrained their words and only told us things in ways that most people could visualize.*





דב אומר ישאו מדבר ועריו חצרים תשב קדר ירנו ישבי סלע מראש הרים יצוחו ישימו ליהוה  
כבוד ותהלתו באיים יגידו



The bear says, "Let the wilderness and its cities raise their voices, the village where Kedar dwells. Let the inhabitants of rock sing, let them shout from the peaks of the mountains. Let them give honor to Hashem and tell of His praise in the islands." (Isaiah 42:11-12)

*Most commentators understand "the inhabitants of rock" to refer to people who build their homes in rocky places, but Rashi cites the Targum Yonasan, who understands it to mean that the dead will praise God at the time of their revival, when they are freed from their rocky abodes.*

אב אומר על כל דבר פשע על שור על חמור על שיה על שלמה על כל אבדה אשר יאמר כי  
הוא זה עד האלהים יבא דבר שניהם אשר ירשיען אלהים ישלם שנים לרעהו

The wolf says, "For every matter of sin, for an ox, for a donkey, for a lamb, for a garment, for every lost object about which one says, 'This is it,' the matter of both of them shall come to the judge. The one whom the judges will find guilty shall pay double to his fellow." (Exodus 22:8)



*The Rambam, in his Guide for the Perplexed (II, 6:1), uses this verse as an example of where the word "elohim" refers to judges. In other places, it refers to angels. When God is called "Elohei ha'elohim," it means that He is Judge over the majestic angels, not that He is Judge over lowly human justices. (Saying that God is superior to humans would be rather faint praise.)*

שוועל אומר הוי בנה ביתו בלא צדק ועליותיו בלא משפט ברעהו יעבד חנם ופעלו לא יתן לו



The fox says, "Woe to one who builds his house without righteousness and his lofts without justice, using his fellow's labor for free and he doesn't give him for his wage." (Jeremiah 22:13)

*The Zohar (Tazria 173) explains that harmful forces flee from a place where righteousness exists. However, whichever force gets to a place first acquires it. If righteousness gets there first, great, but if not... look out!*

## זָרְזִיר אֹמֵר רְנֵנוּ צְדִיקִים בְּיַי לַיְשָׁרִים נְאוּה תְהִלָּה

The hound says, "Let the righteous rejoice in Hashem; praise is fitting for the upright." (Psalms 33:1)

*According to Machzor Vitry (Hilchos Shabbos 139:1), when the righteous experience God, they are immediately inspired to sing praises to Him. We see this from our forefather Yitzchak who, when he was bound on the altar, had a vision of the heavens opening and sang.*



## עֲכָבֵר אֹמֵר אֲרוּמְמָהּ יי כִּי דָלִיתָנִי וְלֹא־שִׂמְחָתָ אִיבִי לִי

The mouse says, "I will exalt You, Hashem, because You have raised me up and You have not let my enemies rejoice over me." (Psalms 30:2)



*The Radak explains what King David is saying here: "If You had not raised me up and forgiven me, my enemies would have rejoiced because of me. Now (since God has*

*raised and forgiven David), You have not caused them to rejoice; You have caused them to mourn."*

## חֲתוּל אֹמֵר אִם־תִּגְבִּיָּה כִּנְשֹׁר וְאִם־בֵּין כּוֹכָבִים שִׁים קִנְךָ מִשָּׁם אֲוִרִידָךְ נְאֻם־יי

The cat says, "If you rise like an eagle and place your nest among the stars, from there I shall bring you down, says Hashem." (Obadiah 1:4)

*The prophet Obadiah was a convert who prophesied about the nation of Edom, the descendants of Esau. Based on this verse, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedarim 3:8) says that, in the future, Esau will wrap himself in his tallis and try to sit among the righteous, only to be expelled by God. (That the righteous are compared to stars is explicit in Daniel 12:3.)*



וְכַשְׁמַגִּיעוּ אוֹמֵר אֲרִדְדוּף אוֹיְבֵי וְאֲשִׁיגֵם וְלֹא־אָשׁוּב עַד־כְּלוֹתָם

When the cat catches the mouse, it says, “I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and I did not turn back until they were destroyed.” (Psalms 18:38)



*The Mesillas Yesharim (chapter 10) says that David could only achieve this degree of success because he had mastered the trait of spiritual cleanliness. Other righteous kings like Asa and Chizkiyahu could not request such a gift from God because they had not achieved David’s level in this trait.*

וְעִכְבָּר אוֹמֵר וְאַתָּה צְדִיק עַל כָּל־הַבָּא עָלַי כִּי־אָמַת עָשִׂיתָ וְאֲנִי הִרְשָׁעִיתִי

The mouse replies, “You are righteous in all that comes upon me, because You have performed truth and I have acted evilly” (paraphrased from Nehemiah 9:33, which is in the first-person plural).

*The Ramban on parshas Noach (Genesis 6:9) uses this verse in explaining Noah’s righteousness. Since he was perfectly righteous, Noah was worthy to be saved from the flood without any punishment at all. This is unlike those who act evilly, whom God punishes in truth.*



## Chapter 6

שָׂרְצִים אוֹמְרִים יִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֲשִׂיו בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן יִגִּילוּ בְּמֶלְכָם

The creeping things say, “Let Israel rejoice in the One Who made him; let the children of Zion exult in their King.” (Psalms 149:2)



*Mesillas Yesharim (chapter 19) explains that true joy is when one’s heart delights that he gets to serve Hashem, and to occupy himself with God’s Torah and mitzvos. The further one delves into the knowledge of God’s greatness, the more his joy will increase and the more his heart will sing, as per our verse.*



אֵלִים שֶׁבַּשְׂרָצִים אֹמְרִים אֶשְׁתֶּךָ כְּגֶפֶן פְּרִיָּה בִּירְכָתֵי בֵּיתְךָ בְּנִיָּה כְּשֶׁתֵּלִי זֵיתִים סָבִיב לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ



The aggressive among the creeping things say, “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your house; your children like olive shoots around your table.” (Psalms 128:3)

*Based on this verse, the Talmud in Brachos (57a) derives that if a man dreams of a vine bearing grapes, he can be confident that his wife will carry to term; if he dreams of olive trees, he can expect to have many children.*

נָחַשׁ אֹמֵר סוּמָךְ יי לְכָל הַנְּפֹלִים זֶזְקֶךָ לְכָל הַכְּפוּפִים

The snake says, “Hashem supports all the fallen and straightens all the bent.” (Psalms 145:14)

*Also in Talmud Brachos (4b), the question is asked why no verse in the prayer Ashrei (an alphabetical acrostic) starts with the letter nun. The Gemara refers us to Amos 5:2, which discusses the downfall of Israel. (N-F-L is the Hebrew root meaning to fall.) Nevertheless, David used the next verse – samech – to assure us that God supports those who have fallen.*



עֲקָרָב אֹמֵר טוֹב יי לְכָל יִרְחָמָיו עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו

The scorpion says, “Hashem is good to all and His mercy is on all of His works.” (Psalms 145:9)

*The Rambam tells us that the Sages commanded us to visit non-Jews when they're sick, to help bury their dead and to support their needy based on this verse (Melachim 10:12). God has commanded us to emulate His trait of being merciful to all (Avadim 9:8).*

שֶׁבִּלּוּל אֹמֵר כְּמוֹ שֶׁבִּלּוּל תִּמְסֵ יְהִלֶּךְ נֶפֶל אֶשֶׁת בֵּל חָזוּ שְׁמֶשׁ

The snail says, “Like a snail that melts away and passes, the stillborn of a mole that does not see the sun.” (Psalms 58:9)

*Bereishis Rabbah (Parshas Vayeira) applies this verse to the inhabitants of Sodom. We say that our enemies should be like those who never saw the sun. Along these lines, we see that the sun rose over Sodom after God had rained fire and brimstone on it.*



נְמִלָּה אוֹמֶרֶת לָהּ אֵל נְמִלָּה עֲצֵל רְאֵה דְרָכֶיהָ וְחִכָּם



The ant says, “Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise.” (Proverbs 6:6)

*The Midrash in Devarim Rabbah (chapter 5) explains that what the ant stockpiles in the summer serves her in the winter. Similarly, we should stockpile mitzvos in this world to serve us in the Next World.*

חֲלָדָה אוֹמֶרֶת כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תִּהְיֶה יְהִי הַלְלוּיָהּ

The weasel says, “Let every soul praise Hashem – Hallelujah!” (Psalms 150:6)

*Rashi on Eiruvin 18b explains that the Kohanim in the Temple blessed Hashem using the Tetragrammaton (Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei), which only they were permitted to pronounce. Since the Temple was destroyed, we all praise God using just the letters Yud-Hei.*



כָּל־בָּיִם אוֹמְרִים בָּאוּ נִשְׁתַּחֲוּהוּ וְנִכְרַעַה נִבְרָכָה לְפָנָי יי עֲשֵׂנוּ



The dogs say, “Come, let us bow and prostrate; let us kneel before Hashem our Maker.” (Psalms 95:6)

*The ibn Ezra understands “our Maker” to mean that Hashem made the dry land and the sea. These are the general materials from which all the details were made.*

רַבִּי יֵשׁוּעָה תִּלְמִידוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בֶן דּוֹסָא הִתְעַנָּה חֲמִשׁ וּשְׁמוֹנִים תַּעֲנִיּוֹת אָמַר כְּלָבִים שִׁכְתוּב בָּהֶם וְהַכְּלָבִים עֲזִי נֶפֶשׁ לֹא יָדְעוּ שִׁבְעָה יָזְכוּ לֹאמַר שִׁירָה עָנָה לוֹ מִלֶּאֱרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאָמַר לוֹ יֵשׁוּעָה עַד מַתִּי אַתָּה מִתְעַנֶּה עַל זֶה הַדְּבָר שֶׁבִּוְעָה הִיא מִלִּפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא מִיּוֹם שֶׁגִּילָה סוּדוֹ לַחֲבִקוּק הַנְּבִיא לֹא גָלָה דְבָר זֶה לְשׁוּם בְּרִיאָה בְּעוֹלָם אֲלֵא בְּשִׁבִיל שִׁתְּלִמְדוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם גְּדוֹל אַתָּה שְׁלַחֲנִי מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם לְזַדְקֶק אֵלַיךְ לְהַגִּיד לְךָ בְּמָה זָכוּ הַכְּלָבִים לֹאמַר שִׁירָה לְפִי שִׁכְתוּב בָּהֶם וְלִכְלָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחַרְץ כְּלָב לְשׁוֹנוֹ וְלֹא עוֹד אֲלֵא שֶׁזָּכוּ לְעַבֵּד עוֹרוֹת מִצּוֹאֲתֶם שִׁכְתוּבִים בָּהֶם תְּפִילִין וּמְזוֹזוֹת וְסִפְרֵי תוֹרָה עַל כֵּן זָכוּ לֹאמַר שִׁירָה וְלַעֲנִין הַשְּׂאֵלָה שֶׁשְּׂאֵלָתָּ חֲזוֹר לְאַחֲרֶיהָ וְאֵל תּוֹסִיף בַּדְּבָר הַזֶּה עוֹד כְּמוֹ שִׁכְתוּב שׁוֹמֵר פִּי וְלִשׁוֹנוֹ שׁוֹמֵר מִצְרוֹת נֶפֶשׁוֹ. בְּרוּךְ יי לְעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן

Rabbi Yeshaya, the student of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, fasted 85 fasts. He said, “Dogs, about which it is written (Isaiah 56:11), ‘The dogs are of brazen spirit; they don’t know satisfaction’ — should they merit singing (God’s) praises?” An angel answered him from Heaven, saying, “Yeshaya, how long will you fast over this matter? It is an oath from before the Omnipresent, Blessed be He. From the day that He revealed his secret to the prophet Habakkuk, He has not revealed this matter to any creation in the world. However, since you are the student of a great man, I have been sent from Heaven to assist you, to tell you through what the dogs merit to sing (God’s) praises. It is because it is written of them (Exodus 11:7), ‘No dog whet its tongue against any of the children of Israel.’ Not only that, they merited that hides on which tefillin, mezuzos and Torah scrolls are written are tanned with their excrement. Therefore they merited to sing praises. And in the matter of the question that you asked, retract and don’t continue in this matter further, as it is written (Proverbs 21:23),



‘One who guards his mouth and his tongue guards from afflictions of his soul.’” Blessed is Hashem forever, Amen and Amen! (Yalkut Shimoni, Bo 187)



*There are so many things from which we should guard our mouths and our tongues! These include from speaking disparagingly (ibn Ezra), from talking too much (Metzudas Dovid), from revealing information to one who will act impulsively (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Hilchos Rechilus), and even from overeating (Hilchos Deios 4:15)!*



# Prayer for After Reciting Perek Shira

Composed by Rav Mordechai Gross

רבון כל העולמים יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהי ואלהי אבותי שבזכות פרק שירה שקראתי שהוא שירת הדומם הצומח והחי, והמלאכים הממנים עליהם מאת די יתברך שתהא אמירתו כהקרבת קרבן על גבי המזבח שתהא שעה זו שעת רחמים שעת הקשבה שעת האזנה ונקראך ותענינו בעתיר לך והעתר לנו

Master of all worlds, may it be desirable before You, my God and the God of my fathers, that in the merit of *Perek Shira*, which I have recited, which is the song of the inanimate, the plants and the animals, and of the angels appointed over them by Hashem, may He be blessed, that its recitation be like offering a sacrifice on the altar, that this time be a time of mercy, a time of hearkening, a time of attention, in which we call upon You and You answer us, we entreat You and You entreat us.



שתהיה עולה לפניך אמירת פרק שירה כאלו השגנו כל הסודות הנפלאות והנוראות אשר הם חתומים בו בכל תנאיו החזירנו בתשובה שלמה לפניך ונזכה למקום שהנפשות הרוחות והנשמות נחצבות משם וכאלו עשינו כל אשר מוטל עלינו להשיג בין בגלגול זה בין בגלגולים אחרים ומלא כל משאלות לבנו לטובה ותשלח ברכה הצלחה והרוחה בכל מעשה ידינו ונזכה לשורר לעתיד לבוא ותשיב שכינתך לעיר קדשך במהרה בימינו אמן



May the recitation of *Perek Shira* arise before You as if we understood all the secrets, wonders and awe that are sealed within it in all its forms. Return us in complete repentance before You, and may we merit the place from which souls, spirits and psyches originate as if we had done all that is incumbent upon us to understand, whether in this incarnation or in other incarnations. Fill all the requests of our hearts for good, and send blessing, success and

relief in all the works of our hands. May we merit to sing in the future to come and may You return Your presence to Your holy city speedily in our days, amen.