

Shabbat Shirah: A Shabbat of Song and Special Halakhot

(prepared by Rabbi Tobias Divack Moss)

אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת ליהוה ויאמרו לאמר	אשירה ליהוה כי גאה גאה	סוס
ורכבו רמה בים	עזי וחמרת יה ויהי כלי	לישועה
אבי וארממזהו	זה אכלי ואצוהו	אכלהי
שמו	יהוה איש מלחמה יהוה	ומבחר
שלשיו טבעו בים סוף	מרכבת פרעה וחילו ירה בים	תהמות יכסימו ירדו במצולות כמו
אבן	ימינך יהוה צאדרי בכוז	ימינך
יהוה תרעק אויב	וברב גאונך תדהרס	קמך
אפיק צערמו מים	תשלח זרנך יאכלמו כקש	וברוח
גזלים	קפאו תהמת בכלב ים	אמר
אויב ארדף אשני	אחלק שלל תמלאמו	צפתי
צפתי	אריק זרבי תורישמו ידי	צפתי
ברוחך כסמו ים	שכלו כעופרת במים	מי
אדירים	מי כמכה באלם יהוה	נורא תהלת עשה
כמכה צאדך בקדש	זלית ימינך תבלעמו ארץ	זלית
פלא	זהלת בעזך אל צוה	זלית
בחסדך עם זו גאלת	שמעו עמים ירגזון	זלית
קדשך	אז גבהלו אלופי	זלית
אחז ישובי פלשת	אילי מואב יאחזמו רעד	זלית
אדום	תפל עליהם אימתה	זלית
כל ישובי כנען	בגדל זרועך ידמו כאבן	זלית
ופוזז	עד יעבר עם זו	זלית
יעבר עמך יהוה	תבאמו ותשעמו בהר צחלתך	זלית
קצית	מקדש אדני כוזנו	זלית
לשבתך פעלת יהוה	יהוה ימלך לעלם ועד	זלית
ידיך	וישב יהוה עלהם	זלית
בא סוס פרעה ברכבו ובפרשיו בים	ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים	זלית



Megillah 16b:11

Rabbi Ḥanina bar Pappa said that Rabbi Sheila, a man of the village of Timarta, interpreted a verse homiletically: All of the songs in the Bible are written in the form of a half brick arranged upon a whole brick and a whole brick arranged upon a half brick, i.e., each line of the song is divided into a stitch of text, referred to as a half brick, which is separated by a blank space, referred to as a whole brick, from the concluding stitch of that line of text. The next line of the song inverts the sequence.



Tractate Soferim 12:11

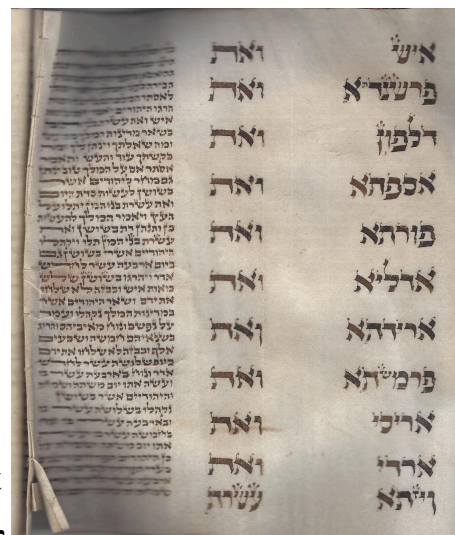
The Song of the Sea has thirty line systems: *Then. Saying. And his rider. Salvation. etc.*

מסכת סופרים י"ב:י"א

שירת הים שלשים שיטין. אז. לאמר. ורכבו. לישועה. אבי. שמו. שלשיו. אבן. ה'. קמין. אפין. נוזלים. אויב נפשי. ברוחך. אדירים. כמוכה. פלא. בחסדך. קדשיך. אחז. אדום. כל. ופחד. יעבור. קנית. לשבתך. ידיך. בא. מי :

Megillah 16b:12

This is the principle for all songs in the Bible except for this song, referring to the list of Haman's sons, and the song listing the kings of Canaan who were defeated by Joshua. These two songs are written in the form of a half brick arranged upon a half brick and a whole brick arranged upon a whole brick, i.e., one stitch of text over another, and one blank space over another. What is the reason that these two songs are written in this anomalous fashion? So that they should never rise from their downfall. Just as a wall that is built in this manner will not stand, so too, these individuals should have no resurgence.



Shemot Rabbah 23:4

4: An explanation of: "Then Moshe sang", like that which is written in Mishlei (31:26) "Her mouth is open with wisdom and the teachings of kindness on her tongue." From the day that God created the world until Israel stood at the sea, we do not find a man who uttered song to God, other than Israel. The first man, Adam, was created and did not sing a song, Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace and the kings and didn't sing a song. And so too Yitzchak was saved from the knife and didn't sing a song.

And Yaakov from the king and from Eisav, from the people of Shechem and didn't sing a song. When Israel came to the sea and it was parted for them, immediately they sang to God, as it says: *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel.*

Sotah 30b:11-15

Our Rabbis taught: On that day R. Akiba expounded: At the time the Israelites ascended from the Red Sea, they desired to utter a Song; and how did they render the song? Like an adult who reads the Hallel [for a congregation] and they respond after him with the leading word.[According to this explanation] Moses said: 'I will sing unto the Lord' and they responded, 'I will sing unto the Lord'; Moses said: 'For He hath triumphed gloriously' and they responded, 'I will sing unto the Lord'. R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean declares, Like a minor who reads the Hallel [for a congregation], and they repeat after him all that he Says.¹⁵ [According to this explanation] Moses said: 'I will sing unto the Lord' and they responded, 'I will sing unto the Lord'; Moses said: 'For He hath triumphed gloriously' and they responded, 'For He hath triumphed gloriously'.

Feeding the Birds

(Sources taken from various articles by Rabbi Diana Miller, Jerry Friedman, Halacha Yomit)

Minhag: Some have the custom this Shabbat to place food, seeds, wheat kernels, and the like in front of birds.

Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov, a 20th century rabbi, says that the birds receive their reward on Shabbat Shirah for the songs which they utter to God every day, and when we joyously recite our Song praising God for having taken us out of Egypt and saved us from the Egyptians, we remember their songs. We borrowed their skill; therefore we “pay it back” by feeding birds on this Shabbat.

A midrash states that the children of the Jewish nation fed seeds that grew from the trees inside the Red Sea to birds and these birds then joined in Israel’s song of praise to Hashem.

An unnamed 18th century rabbi taught that birds sang at the Sea when the Israelites crossed and we are therefore grateful to them. Thus, the purpose of feeding them is to remember the joy of Shirat Hayam, the Song of the Sea.

The Hasidic Rebbe, the Sfat Emet looks at a quote from Psalms, “Our soul has escaped like a bird out of the hunter’s trap.” He teaches that in Egypt, the Israelite’s very desire was imprisoned. He quotes again from the Psalms, “Release my soul from prison, so that I may give thanks to Your name.” We give thanks for Yitziat Mitzriam, coming out of Egypt, escaping prison, with song. Like the singing bird who escapes the hunter’s trap, we escaped from the Pharaoh and what did we do? Like birds, we sang.

A Midrash links feeding birds with their role in the biblical story of the double portion of manna that miraculously appeared on Friday so that the Israelites would not have to gather manna on Shabbat. A midrash tells us that two trouble-makers, Dathan and Aviram, put out manna Friday evening so that the people would discover it on the morning of Shabbat and Moses and God would be discredited. But the birds gobbled up all the manna before the people awoke, preserving the miracle of the double portion of manna on Friday and its absence on Shabbat and, thus, confirming the leadership of Moses.

Jerry Friedman’s naturalist perspective: I suspect that Israelites were feeding birds at this time of the year long before the customs, halakhah, and *midrashim* of the rabbis emerged. I believe the practice originated during the Israelites’ journey through the desert, where they would have witnessed a striking annual natural phenomenon. Each spring, 500 million birds migrate up the rift valley in Africa, along the Red Sea, across the Sinai Peninsula, north through the Arava and Jordan Valley, dispersing at last to summer homes throughout Asia Minor and Europe. The Israelites would have witnessed flocks of raptors seeking the warm morning updrafts to traverse the mountains, great flocks of storks and cranes darkening the sky and creating a din with their beating wings. They would have seen the tiny vulnerable songbirds, the warblers and finches with their beautiful colors and melodic songs.

...And a problem: The Prohibition to Feed Ownerless Animals on Shabbat

At first glance, it would seem as though this custom is halachically unacceptable, for one may not feed any animal which one is not responsible to feed on Shabbat. It is thus prohibited for one to feed wild birds or animals, which are not one’s responsibility to feed, on Shabbat. Therefore, the Magen Avraham writes that this custom to feed birds wheat kernels on Shabbat Shira is a mistake and should be abolished. The Mishnah Berura (Chapter 324, Subchapter 31) rules accordingly.

A Stringent Solution: One who nevertheless would like to observe this custom may do so by leaving a plate of seeds on the windowsill or anywhere else before the onset of Shabbat and birds will almost surely arrive on Shabbat morning to partake of these seeds. In this way, there is no prohibition according to all opinions.

A Lenient Solution:

Nevertheless, Rav Ovadia Yosef writes in his Sefer Livyat Chen that many of the great Acharonim question the words of the Magen Avraham and write that since this custom was enacted as a Mitzvah, one may indeed follow this custom on Shabbat Shira.