

The background is a vibrant watercolor wash in shades of purple, pink, and yellow. A large white circle is centered on the page, containing the English text. Surrounding the circle are several musical staves with various notes and a treble clef, creating a sense of movement and melody.

*Music
to my Ears*

מזמור לתודה

MUSIC TO MY EARS

מְזִמּוֹר לְתוֹדָה הָרִיעוּ לֵה' כָּל-הָאָרֶץ עֲבַדוּ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה בָּאוּ לְפָנָיו בְּרִנָּה

A song for a thanksgiving offering. Shout to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with joy, come before Him with praise.

In this session, we will explore the depth of this short morning prayer, through looking into the themes of music and gratitude.

MUSIC IS WHAT FEELINGS SOUND LIKE

Most of us absolutely love music. We are compelled by it. We are provoked by it. We are moved by it. We are inspired by it. We feel connected to it. It reflects something profound about who we are and our experience of the world.

If I asked you to tell me your favorite bands, musicians, or genres, most of you could quickly reply with a list of beloved artists. Our favorite singers captivate us with lyrics that have powerful messages and sounds that touch us in some special way. In fact, most of us have playlists for just about every situation and emotion in life: a relaxed playlist for a low-key night at home; an energetic playlist for workouts; a somber playlist for contemplative moments; and an angry playlist that we reach for when we need to scream.



Given the emotionally charged nature of music, it can be an incredibly effective way to express ourselves and cope with challenging life circumstances. Because sometimes life is really hard. Really really hard. Whether it be conflict with family, ending a relationship, or experiencing trauma, we all have moments in which we are brought to our knees with pain, sadness, and confusion.

This is particularly true if you are actively working on being more honest with yourself. Self-deception, at the most basic level, is a protective mechanism: its role is to keep us safe and secure. Often unconsciously, lying to ourselves protects us from knowing truths that would temporarily harm our ego—our core sense of self. As we confront these truths, we are going to feel worse before we feel better. Feeling some discomfort is an inescapable part of the process of becoming more honest with ourselves.

In these tough life moments, music can be a constructive way to express who you are and what you are feeling. If you are feeling particularly sad about a reality in your life, listen to a

song that connects you to that emotion. If you are anxious, turn up the volume in your living room and dance around. If you are angry, grab a pillow and hit it as hard as you can while listening to your favorite lyrics.

I am not suggesting that you use music to wallow in pain or negativity; that would not be positive for your mental health or for those around you. What I am suggesting is that when we are emotionally struggling, we often have a hard time expressing how we feel through words. The intellectual, verbal expression of feelings doesn't do justice to our experience of the emotion. Connecting to music is one effective way to become more honest about who you are, what you are really experiencing, and coping with negative emotion.

The Naked Truth is this: Whether we resonate with rap, classical, house, techno, country, alternative, heavy metal, or blues, music is an incredible vehicle for expressing emotions and capturing our internal experience of life. In times of strife or newly-discovered truths, use it to find your true voice. Perhaps you may want to write your own song, analyze the lyrics of a favorite artist, or play an instrument. Perhaps you will explore new genres that are foreign to you. The key is that music is a powerful vehicle for helping you become more aware and honest with yourself.

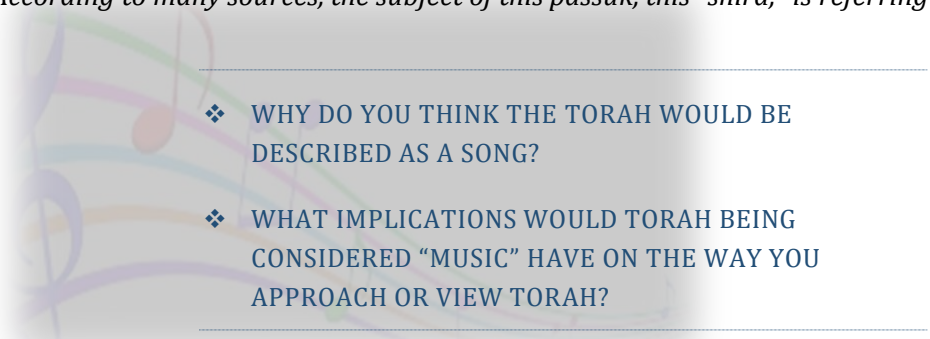
By Cortney S. Warren Ph.D

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- ❖ DO YOU RELATE TO THIS UNDERSTANDING OF MUSIC?
 - ❖ WHY IS MUSIC DIFFERENT FROM REGULAR SPEECH?
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TORAH AS A SONG

Devarim 31:19	דברים לא:יט
Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be My witness against the people of Israel.	ועתה כתבו לכם את-השירה הזאת ולמדה את-בני-ישראל שימה בפיהם למען תהיה-לי השירה הזאת לעד בבני ישראל

According to many sources, the subject of this passuk, this "shira," is referring to the Torah

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- ❖ WHY DO YOU THINK THE TORAH WOULD BE DESCRIBED AS A SONG?
 - ❖ WHAT IMPLICATIONS WOULD TORAH BEING CONSIDERED "MUSIC" HAVE ON THE WAY YOU APPROACH OR VIEW TORAH?
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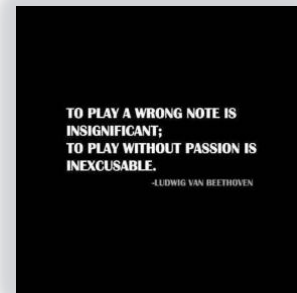
THREE APPROACHES

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

And why call the Torah a song? Because if we are to hand on our faith and way of life to the next generation, it must sing. Torah must be affective, not just cognitive. It must speak to our emotions. As Antonio Damasio showed empirically in *Descartes' Error*, though the reasoning part of the brain is central to what makes us human, it is the limbic system, the seat of the emotions, that leads us to choose this way, not that. If our Torah lacks passion, we will not succeed in passing it on to the future. Music is the affective dimension of communication, the medium through which we express, evoke and share emotion. Precisely because we are creatures of emotion, music is an essential part of the vocabulary of mankind.

Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it modulates into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. Music speaks to something deeper than the mind. If we are to make Torah new in every generation we have to find ways of singing its song a new way. The words never change, but the music does.

- ❖ HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU HAD AN EASIER TIME TELLING OVER AN IDEA BECAUSE YOU FELT PASSIONATELY ABOUT IT?
- ❖ "THE WORDS NEVER CHANGE, BUT THE MUSIC DOES." WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS MEANS?



Explanation by Rabbi Sacks	הקדמה לערוך השלחן
<p>Torah is compared to a song because, to those who appreciate music, the most beautiful choral sound is a complex harmony with many different voices singing different notes. So, he says, it is with the Torah and its myriad commentaries, its "seventy faces." Judaism is a choral symphony scored for many voices, the written text its melody, the oral tradition its polyphony.</p>	<p>וכל מחלוקת התנאים והאמוראים, והגאונים והפוסקים באמת, למבין דבר לאשורו – דברי אלקים חיים המה, ולכולם יש פנים בהלכה. ואדרבה: זאת היא תפארת תורתנו הקדושה והטהורה. וכל התורה כולה נקראת "שירה", ותפארת השיר היא כשהקולות משונים זה מזה, וזהו עיקר הנעימות. ומי שמשוטט בים התלמוד – יראה נעימות משונות בכל הקולות המשונות זה מזה.</p>

- ❖ WHY DOES HAVING MANY DIFFERENT APPROACHES IN TORAH MAKE IT BEAUTIFUL?



- ❖ IS THERE A WAY THAT **YOU** CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THIS “HARMONY?”

Victor Zuckerkandl, philosopher of music

Hearing a melody is hearing, having heard, and being about to hear, all at once. Every melody declares to us that the past can be there without being remembered, the future without being foreknown.

In other words, music is a connection between past, present and future. The Torah serves this function as well.

- ❖ HOW DO YOU THINK TORAH CONNECTS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE?
- ❖ WHICH APPROACH DO YOU RELATE TO MOST AND WHY?

Now, let's get back to Mizmor L'todah...

Shulchan Aruch 51:9	שלחן ערוך נא ט
Mizmor L'todah should be recited in a tune, because all of the songs will be nullified in the future, other than Mizmor L'todah	מִזְמוֹר לְתוֹדָה יֵשׁ לְאָמְרוֹ בְּנִגּוּן שְׁכַל הַשִּׁירוֹת עֲתִידוֹת לְבָטֵל, חוּץ מִמִּזְמוֹר לְתוֹדָה

- ❖ WHY WOULD MIZMOR LTODAH BE THE ONLY SONG TO REMAIN IN THE FUTURE?
- ❖ WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE MESSAGES OF THIS TEFILAH?

*The korban todah, which this tefilah is talking about, was a **voluntary** korban that was brought when a person felt a desire to express gratitude to Hashem.*

A NATURAL “THANK YOU”

Rabbi Avi Baumol – The Poetry of Prayer

G-d commands many things from us; the Torah is replete with 613 laws of how to conduct our daily lives. One thing G-d cannot mandate, however, is that we appreciate Him and thank Him out of a natural human recognition of our Creator. It is, after all, oxymoronic to mandate genuine gratitude.

While G-d does command emotions (fear Him, love Him, love your neighbor...), G-d cannot quantify those emotions for us. G-d says to fear Him, but does not provide us with the method to do so; that is up to each individual. Similarly, with love, which is also a commandment, one must achieve that love through one's own human condition and experience.

The mitzvah of todah is unique in that it asks us to act of our own volition, to volunteer, to offer to G-d when we truly and sincerely experience the feeling of gratitude- a feeling that can never be mandated, but must be achieved.

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- ❖ WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU FELT GENUINE GRATITUDE? DID YOU EXPRESS IT?
 - ❖ ARE YOU MORE LIKELY TO DO SOMETHING IF YOU'RE TOLD TO OR GIVEN THE OPTION?
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There are many different ways of expressing gratitude, and it could depend on both you and the person toward whom you are expressing that gratitude. Some do it with a nice text, a thank you note, or a poem. No matter the venue, it's worth doing! With Hashem, we can also choose how to express gratitude, but one built-in way is through song.

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- ❖ HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN INSPIRING EXPERIENCE WHEN SINGING? OR LISTENING TO MUSIC? WHAT WAS IT LIKE?
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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- ❖ We can understand how to relate to the Torah by thinking about how we relate to music, since Torah is compared to a song
- ❖ Gratitude is something that should come from within but find its way out to others
- ❖ There are so many different ways to express gratitude to Hashem or to others- think of a way that works best for you