

**We Will Sing (Exodus 15:1, 2, 11)**

**Parashat Beshalach**

**January 30, 2026 - 12 Shvat 5786**

**Rabbi Evan Traylor**

Shabbat Shalom!

L'chu n'ran'na, come let us sing!

Shiru l'Adonai, shir chadash - Sing unto God a new song!

Zamru l'Adonai b'chinor v'kol zimrah - Sing praise to God with the lyre and with joyful song!

These are the psalms that we just sang, lifting our voices together to welcome Shabbat. From our ancestors of the Torah all the way to this very day, music and song and singing has been an integral part of our tradition. Purposefully bringing the rhythm, beat, and soul that is at the center of music to help us understand and express our Judaism.

The rabbis of our tradition found that there are nine times in history that the entire community of Israel gathered together to sing. The first comes on the evening that the Israelites first learn that they will be set free from the tyranny of Pharaoh. They join their voices together in song and shouts of joy as they pack everything they can, pile bags onto their backs, and prepare to quickly leave Mitzrayim. The second time comes in this week's Torah portion, when the Israelites actually leave Egypt. If you can imagine with me for a moment: After 430 years of enslavement, the Israelites slowly walk across the Red Sea that has been split in half before them. They witness God foil the last-ditch plans of Pharaoh, and hundreds of thousands of people, our people, break into song and dance and celebration because finally, finally, we are free:

אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאַה גָאַה

I will sing to God, who has triumphed gloriously...

עֲזִי וְזַמְרַת יְהוָה וַיְהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה

God is my strength and might,

And has become my deliverance.

מִי־כַמְכָה בְּאֵלִים יְהוָה מִי כַמְכָה נְאֻדָּר בְּקֹדֶשׁ נֹרָא תְהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פְלֵא:

Who is like You, O Eternal One, among the celestials;

Who is like You, majestic in holiness,

Awesome in splendor, working wonders!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 15:1, 2, 11

Before these two moments of exultation, our people did not sing collectively, so crushed by the weight of enslavement. But these moments of triumph, of joy, of hope, they required something more from us. Something more profound. They required song.

This teaching from our Torah makes me think that our ancestors knew something deep about the human condition that just now, millennia later, we have the science to understand. When we sing or hum, our body activates what is known as the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve is one of the longest nerves in our body, stretching from our brain all the way down to our intestines. It is part of the parasympathetic system, helping us coordinate between our emotional and physical responses. When we sense danger, whether real or imagined, tapping into the vagus nerve can help us to slow our heartrate, get more breath into our lungs, slow the shaking of our hands, and regulate ourselves so that we may address the situation. And one of the best ways to tap into our vagus nerve is by singing because it's connected to our vocal cords and back of our throat.<sup>2</sup> So again, when our ancestors in Ancient Egypt are rushing around, gathering all they can carry to go to this land flowing with milk and honey, it was through singing, collectively, tapping into their vagus nerve, each and everyone of them, that they were able to summon the courage and strength to march to the Promised Land.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20251128-how-singing-can-improve-your-health>

The rabbis of our tradition make another thing clear about this story: that the feeling of singing doesn't just occur during that one moment of song; it continues on into the future. Both Chizkuni and Ibn Ezra, two of our rabbinic commentators, note that the "Israelites singing this song meant for future generations to recite it..." We, all of us gathered here tonight, we are meant to bring the joyfulness, the exuberance of this Song of the Sea to life in our own day and age. Just as we will sing the words of Mi Chamocha tonight, and just as we will reenact the Exodus story during our Passover seder in a couple of months, we are meant to remind ourselves of the sheer exhilaration of freedom and liberation, of moving from the narrowness of Ancient Egypt, to the abundant goodness of the Promised Land.

And yet, as we look around our city, our country, our world, how are we to sing with this level of joy, of excitement, of awe? How are we to sing of God's goodness and glory and triumph and majesty when precious images of God in Minneapolis and elsewhere are being kidnapped, taken without due process; detained, locked away miles from the only home they've ever known; attacked, in their homes hiding or on the streets observing or marching and organizing, and killed, the breath of their lungs taken from them, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, lost to us forever. The impossibility of this moment is magnified by an administration who seems to only want even more violence, even more chaos, and not only fans the flames of destruction and degradation, but enjoy lighting the matches, city by city. How are we to sing this song of freedom and liberation in a moment filled with injustice and oppression?

According to one of our more contemporary sages, one who knew the power of music and song, “the answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind.”<sup>3</sup> The answer just may be that we need to sing. That the melodies and beats and lyrics, the music that has surrounded us and guided us throughout the centuries, can sustain us. We just may need the confidence to know that, yes, it has “been a long time comin’, but I know that a change is gon’ come.”<sup>4</sup> For even though we ask, on repeat, “What’s going on?”, we know that “we don’t need to escalate, war is not the answer, for only love can conquer hate.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Blowin’ in the Wind*, Bob Dylan

<sup>4</sup> *A Change is Gonna Come*, Sam Cooke

<sup>5</sup> *What’s Going On*, Marvin Gaye

The dedication of our ancestors, of past generations can inspire us on this journey to freedom and liberation. Perhaps, just like them, we can try to say, each and every day, that we “woke up this morning, with our minds, stayed on freedom.”<sup>6</sup> And that no matter the chaos of the moment, that each of us can declare “aint’ gonna let nobody turn me around, I’m gonna keep on walking, keep on talking, marching on to freedom land.”<sup>7</sup> And even though we have the gift of Shabbat every week, we may find ourselves taking action on that sacred day, needing to say that “we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.”<sup>8</sup> We will need the confidence to use all of our tools to make a change, showing the world that whether we have a hammer to hammer out danger or a bell to ring out a warning, we know that we have a song to sing and that we can “sing out the love between my brothers and my sisters all over this land.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom*, Sweet Honey in the Rock

<sup>7</sup> *Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*, The Freedom Singers

<sup>8</sup> *Ella’s Song*, Sweet Honey in the Rock

<sup>9</sup> *If I Had a Hammer*, Peter, Paul, & Mary

On the streets of Minneapolis, the group Brass Solidarity is already bringing joy and community through music. Since 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, this group has chosen to use melody, beat, groove, and soul to bring people together, fight for justice, and build a better city for themselves and their loved ones. And if they can do it, in the depths of this moment, who's to say that we can't?

So yes, we will have these moments of trepidation, wondering, how are we to sing our song of freedom when so many are still not free? How do we sing this song of divine triumph when the forces of chaos and hatred seem to be the ones winning? The answer, my friends, is that we will sing. We will sing our song, and these songs, because they have sustained us across millennia. We will sing because it deepens our resolve to not let the chaos of the current moment have the last word. We will sing because singing, together, has allowed us to envision the future, envision a land flowing with milk and honey, envision a world where everyone, all of God's creatures, are loved and cared for. We will sing because we have always sung, and we always will.

On this Shabbat, I pray that the songs of our tradition, the songs of generations past, and the songs of our hearts keep us walking, keep us talking, keep us marching on to freedom land, just like our ancestors, and may we march forward to create the world of our dreams, the world we so desperately need. Shabbat Shalom.