

This Shabbat is Shabbat Shirah- named after the spontaneous song (Shirah) of Moshe and Israel after witnessing the miraculous events at the Red Sea.

And it wasn't just a song for the moment, of a victorious people observing their enemies perishing on the banks of the sea.

Notice that when the Torah introduces the song the verse says:

“Then Moses and the Israelites will sing (*yashir*) this song to G-d”

Our sages remark that *yashir* is in the future tense. One understanding of this is that song is eternal, not just a one-off event for the present. The Shirah is a prescription by which we today declare our personal praises to G-d.

Consider the Mishneh's cryptic description as to how this Shirah was sung.

“Rabbi Akiva says that when the Israelites saw all the wonders of G-d they chanted Shirah like *Halel*. Rabbi Nehemiah says it was recited like *Shema*.”

What is the difference between these two expressions of Shirah?

Certain verses in *Halel* are recited by the reader and then repeated by the congregation; so too Moses recited each verse and Israel repeated each verse together. Rabbi Nehemiah says it was like *Shema*. We recite the first line loud and the rest is recited quietly.

However, I postulate that there is more depth to this argument. *Halel* is the expression of unbridled happiness and thankfulness for G-d's goodness to us. We thank G-d for His interest in our welfare. We praise Him for our families, and His sustenance.

The first aspect of Shirah is *Halel*- we are happy that G-d has made things go according to plan.

But that is not enough. The Jew must add to this *Halel* element an even more important note. And that is that Shirah has to be like the *Shema*.

The *Shema* is not like *Halel*- related to the past. It is concerned solely with the present and the future and what we should do for Him.

The essence of *Shema* is the acceptance of G-d's dominion over the universe and our subservience to Him.

Whereas *Halel* thanks G-d for His gifts to me, in *Shema*, I make of myself a gift to Him. The *Shema* is my personal commitment to G-d.

Shabbat Shalom.