

Dvar Torah Outline — “ברכת השיר,” Eight Praises in יהללוך, and the Significance of אז

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman analyzes the Mishnah and Gemara’s debate over what “ברכת השיר” is at the end of the Seder, explaining why many Haggadot incorporate both יהללוך and נשמת כל חי. He then focuses on a precise claim in the Gemara: within יהללוך there are specifically **eight** concentrated expressions of praise, and this “eight” aligns with a broader Torah pattern where songs are introduced by אז (whose letters total eight). Rabbi Shulman closes by introducing a Midrash (R. Akiva) about Hashem “wearing” a garment engraved with all the occurrences of אז in the Torah—torn after sin and restored in the future—setting up how the Maharal will interpret this symbolism.

I. Framing: “ברכת השיר” in the Mishnah and Gemara

A. Source: Mishnah and the requirement to say “ברכת השיר”

- Rabbi Shulman opens with: “פרק ס”ה. ותנן במשנה ואומר ברכת השיר.”
- The Gemara asks: “מאי ברכת השיר?”

B. The machloket: what is “ברכת השיר”?

- “רב יהודה אמר יהללוך.”
- “ורבי יוחנן אמר נשמת כל חי.”

C. Common practice in many Haggadot

- Rabbi Shulman notes that many versions of the Haggadah effectively include **both** opinions.
 - Practical result: “ואנן אומרים שניהם יהללוך ונשמת כל חי.”
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II. The Gemara's precision: יהללוך contains exactly eight praises (0:30)

A. The key claim

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Gemara's point: when you examine יהללוך carefully, you find שאין כאן רק "שמונה שבחים" (there are only eight praises).

B. Why "יהללוך" itself is not counted among the eight

- Rabbi Shulman explains that "יהללוך ה' כל מעשיו" is structurally separated from the rapid list that follows.
- Therefore, the counting begins from the next sequence—starting with "יודו".

C. The eight "rapid-fire" לשונות of praise

- Rabbi Shulman lists the contiguous chain as the eight:
 - "יודו יברכו ישבחו יפארו ירוממו ויעריצו ויקדישו וימליכו את שמך מלכנו."
 - Reasoning: these eight appear "back-to-back," while any additional praises in the broader paragraph are separated by "lengthy interruptions," so they don't define the Gemara's count.
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III. Why eight? Songs in the Torah are "בשמונה" through the word אז (2:30)

A. Rabbi Shulman's principle

- "אלו שמונה שבחים הם ידועים שכן כל שירות בתורה הם בשמונה כמנין אז"
 - The eight praises align with a broader pattern: **songs in the Torah** reflect an "eight" quality.

B. The evidence: Torah songs that begin with אז

- Rabbi Shulman highlights the recurring opening word אז in major "song moments":
 - "אז ישיר משה"
 - "אז ישיר ישראל"
 - "אז דיבר יהושע"
- Conclusion: these are "לא... coincidentally" introduced with אז; it's "דבר גדול ונפלא מאד" s'.

C. Why אָ points to eight

- Rabbi Shulman explains the numerical basis:
 - “ $(7) \text{ ז} + (1) \text{ א} = \text{אָ} = 8$ ”
 - Clarification he adds in response to a question:
 - The point is not that “eight is the אָ,” but that “אָ is an allusion to the eight.”
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IV. Review of earlier framework: 7 (this world) + 1 above it = 8, beyond time (4:01)

A. Reference to earlier teaching (פרק שירה פרק מ"ז)

- Rabbi Shulman points back to an earlier discussion where he developed this symbolism.

B. Symbolic meaning of the letters

- (7) ז: represents “עולם הזה of עניין” (the structure of this-world existence).
- (1) א: “on top of that”: represents transcendence—rising to “a higher place.”
- Combined, they represent **eight**: “out of this world.”

C. “אָ” as beyond time

- Rabbi Shulman links this “eight” to why אָ functions uniquely:
 - It is “not past tense or future tense... it is not in time.”
 - The word אָ signals a dimension that transcends ordinary temporal categories.
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V. Midrash (Rabbi Akiva): Hashem’s garment engraved with all “אָ” in Torah—torn and restored (5:00)

A. The Midrash’s opening image

- Rabbi Shulman quotes the Midrash:
 - “ובמדרש אמר רבי עקיבא בשעה שאמרו ישראל אז ישיר לבש חלוק של תפארת שהיו חקוקין עליו כל אָ” שבתורה”
 - (In Rabbi Akiva’s Midrash: when Israel said “אָז ישיר,” Hashem “wore” a glorious garment engraved with every “אָ” in the Torah.)

B. Examples of “אז” used as “decorations”

- Rabbi Shulman lists examples the Midrash includes (as occurrences of אז that are “engraved”):
 - “אז תשמח בתולה”
 - “אז ידלג כאיל פסח”
 - “אז תפקחנה עיני עורים”
 - “אז ידבר יהושע”
 - “אז תראי”
 - “אז ... ונהרת”

C. A cited phrase that raises a question

- Rabbi Shulman notes the Midrash continues:
 - “שנאמר את השם האמרת והשם האמירך היום”
 - He points out: “Wait, but there is no אז over there,” and suggests it may not be another “אז example,” but rather a supporting proof-text about mutual “making special” (Israel affirming Hashem; Hashem affirming Israel).

D. The theological takeaway Rabbi Shulman draws from the Midrash

- The “robe” imagery expresses that Israel, through these moments of אז (especially אז ישיר), can “beautify Hashem,” so to speak—making Hashem “special כביכול.”

E. The tearing of the garment after sin

- Rabbi Shulman continues the Midrash:
 - “וכיון שחטאו ישראל קרעו”
- He hypothesizes the reference is likely to חטא העגל, since it follows the episode of שירת הים.
- Proof-text cited in the Midrash:
 - “שנאמר בצע אמרתו”

F. The future restoration

- The Midrash concludes with restoration “לעתיד לבוא”:
 - “ואז הקדוש ברוך הוא החזירו שנאמר אז ימלא שחוק פינו”
 - Rabbi Shulman notes the theme: in the future, the “אז” dimension returns, producing renewed joy.

G. Transition: setting up the Maharal

- Rabbi Shulman ends by indicating the next step is to see how the Maharal will interpret (“דרשן”) this Midrash and its symbols.
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VI. In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman clarifies the Gemara's debate over "ברכת השיר," and why many communities say both יהללוך and נשמת כל חי.
- He highlights that יהללוך contains a core sequence of **eight** tightly-linked praises: "יודו... וימליכו."
- He ties "eight" to the Torah's pattern of song via **אז**, whose letters equal eight and symbolize transcendence beyond ordinary time.
- He introduces a Midrash of Rabbi Akiva portraying "אז" as Israel's spiritual "decoration" for Hashem—lost after sin and restored in the future—foreshadowing a forthcoming Maharal-based explanation.