

The Four-Part Song

R. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Kodesh*, 2:444-45

THERE is one who sings the song of his own private soul, discovering within it everything, finding there the fullness of spiritual satisfaction.

AND THERE is another who sings the song of his people. He emerges from the confines of his individual soul, finding that it is not expansive enough, nor is it properly grounded.

This one strives for the heights. With a love that is gentle he attaches himself to the totality of the Community of Israel, joining with her in singing her songs; he knows grief in her afflictions and delight in her hopes. With sublime and pure insights he meditates on her past and on her future; with love and wisdom he gains understanding of her inner spiritual nature.

AND THERE is another whose soul expands even further; transcending the boundaries of Israel, he sings the song of all humanity. The vista of his spirit encompasses the entire human race; he knows the nobility of human nature; he aspires to the potential of all mankind and awaits its higher fulfillment. All his reflections, all his study, all his strivings, all his vision he draws from this fount of life.

AND THERE is one who expands even higher, until he becomes one with the entire cosmos, with all creatures, with all worlds, singing a song with them all. It is of such a person that tradition has said that whosoever studies *Perek Shirah*¹ each day is assured of a share in the world to come.

¹ ***Perek Shirah*** (פרק שירה, lit. "Chapter of Song"), an ancient Jewish text. It contains 84 sections, in each of which elements of creation, beginning with the celestial and ending with dogs, use biblical and rabbinic verses in order to sing God's praises. Lamentably absent from modern *siddurim*.

AND THEN there is one who ascends with all these songs, making of them a single ensemble, in which each puts forth its voices. Together they sing their songs with beauty, and lend vitality and life one to another. These are sounds of joy and gladness, sounds of jubilation and celebration, sounds of ecstasy and holiness.

In this person, the song of the individual soul, the song of the people, the song of the human race, the song of the entire cosmos -- all merge within him, at all times, at every moment.

And this wholeness rises in its fullness to become a song of holiness, a song of God, a song of Israel, in its power and its glory, in its truth and its greatness.

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The name "Israel" can be read *shir el*, song of God. It is a simple song, a two-part song, a three-part song, and a four-part song. It is the *Song of Songs of Solomon* (Shlomo). It is the song of "the King in whom is wholeness."

[Preliminary translation prepared by Jonathan Omer-Man. Not for distribution.]