



BESHALACH

ONE SONG, A MILLION VOICES

A True Leader Can Make Us One

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Beshalach

Soon after allowing the Children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the Children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d.

In the desert, the people suffer thirst and hunger. They

repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff. G-d causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning and causes quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The Children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the Divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and

go to gather manna on the seventh day but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses's prayers and an army raised by Joshua.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

In your view, what is the single critical denominator that cuts through all our differences and renders us a single nation?

After the spectacular miracle, the Jews burst into song in praise of G-d.



TEXT 1

Exodus 15:1

אָז יְשִׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת
לַה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאֹמֶר, אֲשִׁירָה לַה' כִּי גָאֵה גָאֵה.

Then Moses and the Children of Israel sang this song to G-d, and they said, saying, "I will sing to G-d for He is most lofty."

לֵאמֹר — “saying”

lemor

An instruction to the audience to repeat the message to others.

QUESTION

Why does the Torah use the word “saying”?

TEXT 2A

Talmud, Sukkah 38a

מִי שֶׁהֵיָה . . . קָטָן מִקָּרִיִן אֹתוֹ, עֹנֶה אַחֲרָיֶהוּ
מָה שֶׁהֵן אֹמְרִין . . . אִם הֵיָה גָדוֹל מִקָּרֵא
אֹתוֹ, עֹנֶה אַחֲרָיו הִלְלוּיָהּ.

If a child leads the Hallel prayer, repeat every word after him. . . . If an adult leads, reply to each stanza with "Halleluy-ah!"

INTERACTIVE PRAYER

- **Leader is obligated:**
Listen with intention,
then reply to each stanza
with “Halleluy-ah!”
- **Leader not obligated:**
Repeat word for word.



TEXT 2B

Talmud, Sotah 30b

דַּרְשׁ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: בְּשַׁעָה שְׁעָלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הַיָּם נִתְּנוּ עֵינֵיהֶם לֹאמַר שִׁירָה.

וְכִיצַד אָמְרוּ שִׁירָה?

כְּגֹדוֹל הַמִּקְרָא אֶת הַלֵּל וְהֵן עוֹנִין אַחֲרָיו רֵאשִׁי כְּרָקִים. מִנְּשָׁה אָמַר "אֲשִׁירָה לֵה" (שְׁמוֹת טו, א), וְהֵן אוֹמְרִים "אֲשִׁירָה לֵה". מִנְּשָׁה אָמַר "כִּי גָאָה גָאָה", וְהֵן אוֹמְרִים "אֲשִׁירָה לֵה".

רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בְּנוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי יוֹסֵי הַגָּלִילִי אוֹמֵר: כְּקֶטֶן הַמִּקְרָא אֶת הַלֵּל וְהֵן עוֹנִין אַחֲרָיו כָּל מָה שֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר. מִנְּשָׁה אָמַר "אֲשִׁירָה לֵה", וְהֵן אוֹמְרִים "אֲשִׁירָה לֵה". מִנְּשָׁה אָמַר "כִּי גָאָה גָאָה", וְהֵן אוֹמְרִים "כִּי גָאָה גָאָה".

רַבִּי נְחֶמְיָה אוֹמֵר: כְּסוֹפֵר הַפּוֹרֵס עַל שְׁמַע בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת, שֶׁהוּא פּוֹתֵחַ תְּחִילָה וְהֵן עוֹנִין אַחֲרָיו.

Rabbi Akiva taught that when the Jews climbed from the sea, they were inspired to sing an ode to G-d.

How did they sing?

As an adult who leads the Hallel prayer, and the congregation repeats the first word of each chapter. Moses said, "I will sing to G-d," and they replied, "I will sing to G-d." Moses said, "For He is very lofty," and they replied, "I will sing to G-d."

Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Yosei the Galilean, said, "As a minor who leads the Hallel prayer, and the congregation repeats word for word." Moses said, "I will sing to G-d," and they replied, "I will sing to G-d." Moses said, "For He is very lofty," and they repeated, "For He is very lofty."

Rabbi Nechemiah said, "As a cantor who leads the Shema prayer in the synagogue. The cantor chants the opening words, and the congregation joins him in prayer."

HOW DID MOSES LEAD THE SONG?

1. **Rabbi Akiva:** Moses led with each stanza, and the people replied with the first word of the stanza.
2. **Rabbi Eliezer:** Moses led each stanza, and the people repeated it.
3. **Rabbi Nechemiah:** Moses began each stanza, and the people joined him.

ANSWER

The Torah uses the word “saying” because Moses led the song, and the Jews chimed in. They did not sing all together.

QUESTIONS

1. What lesson does this teach us?
2. If Moses didn't say all the words of this spontaneous prayer, how did the people know what to sing?
3. If the Jews knew the prayer, why did they need Moses to begin it? They could have all started together.

“וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר, אֲשִׁירָה.”

“... *Vayomru lemor, 'Ashirah'*”

“... and they said, saying, 'I will sing.'”

QUESTION

Why does Text One shift from plural form to the singular?

ANSWER

The shift to the singular form tells us that they sang in perfect unity, as if they were one person.

TEXT 3A

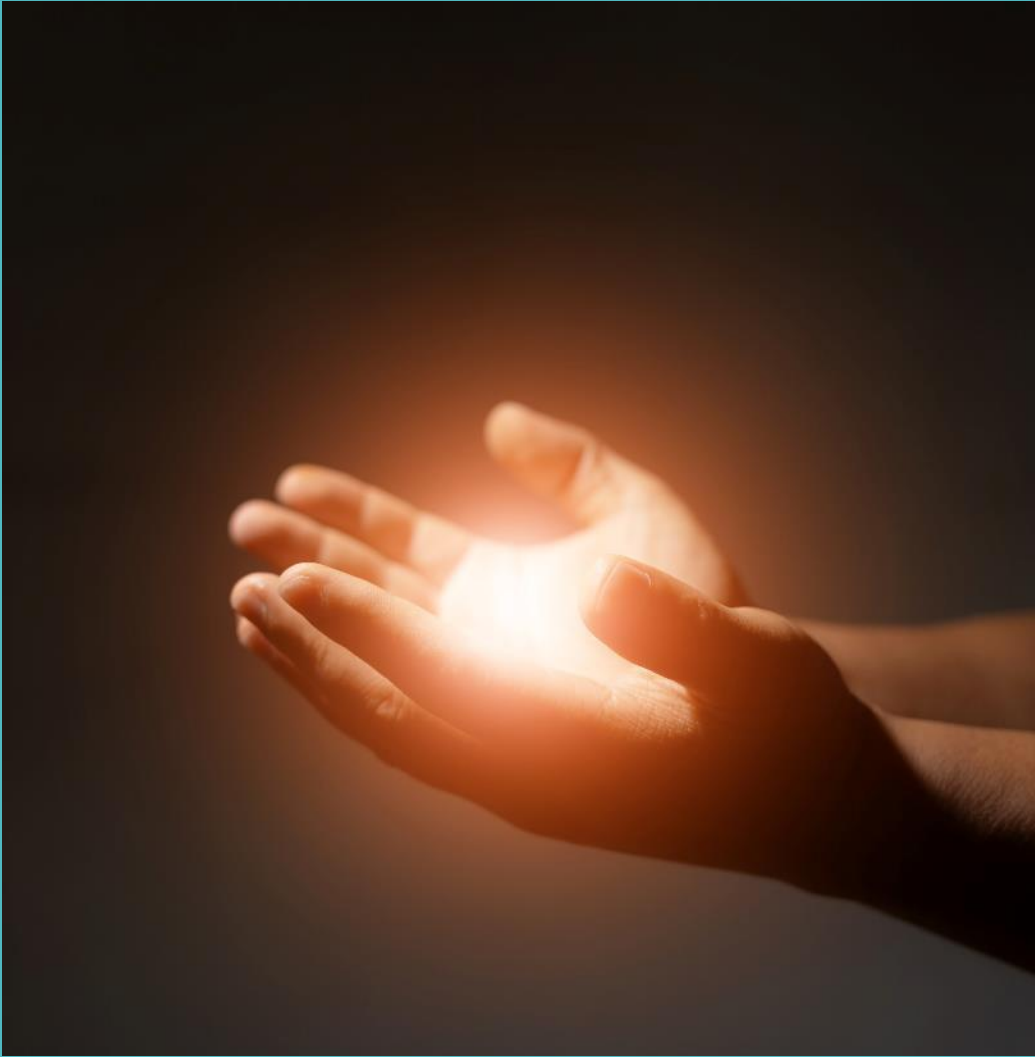
*Rabbi Chaim ibn
Atar, Or Hachayim,
Exodus 15:1*

”ויאמרו, לאמר, אשירה”.

פירוש אמרו זה לזה, ”לאמר”, פירוש שיאמרו שירה יחד בלא בקינות השתנות והפרדה עד שיהיו כאיש אחד הגם יהותם רבים. ונתכוננו יחד ועשו כן, ואמרו ”אשירה” לשון יחיד, כאילו הם איש אחד, שזולת זה היו אומרים ”נשירה”.

“... and they said, saying, ‘I will sing.’”

This means, one said to the other, “Let’s say. Let’s sing an ode together, without difference or separation, to the point of oneness, though we are many.” They concentrated together and accomplished their goal. They said, “I will sing,” in the singular tense, as if they were one person. Otherwise, they would have said, “We will sing.”



The Jews entered a state of *ru'ach hakodesh*, which enabled them to sing as one entity.

TEXT 3B

*Rabbi Chaim ibn
Atar, ibid.*

כִּי כְּשֶׁנִּכְנְסָה בְּלִבָּם יִרְאֵת הָרוֹמְמוֹת וְהָאֲמוּנָה
הַשְּׁלִימָה אֲזַז זָכוּ לִזְמַר שִׁירָה בְּרוּחַ הַקּוֹדֶשׁ.

When their hearts were filled with complete faith and awe of His loftiness, they sang the ode with a sacred spirit.

The unity at the Red Sea was not new. It was a reclamation of our original united state.

If unity is our original state, why is it not our usual state?



TEXT 4

*Rabbi David ibn
Zimra on Mishneh
Torah, Laws of the
Rebellious Ones 2:4*

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֵילּוּ הֵם גּוּף אֶחָד. וְאַף עַל פִּי שְׂגוּפִין
מְחולָקִין הֵם, כִּיּוֹן שְׂנֵשְׂמוֹתֵיהֶם מִמָּקוֹם אֶחָד חוֹצְבוֹ
הָרִי הֵם כְּגוּף אֶחָד, כִּי הַנְּשָׁמָה הִיא עֵיקָר.

All Jews are akin to one body. Though our bodies are separated, our souls are from one place; thus we are like one body. For the soul is primary.



The soul is
primary.

THE COLLECTIVE SOUL

In each generation, one person carries the collective soul.

Moses, who embodied this collective soul, united the people, and together they sang as one.

TEXT 5

*Rabbi Shabetai ben Meir
Hakohen, Sifte Kohen
al HaTorah, p. 52a*

"אֲשִׁירָה לַה'" (שְׁמוֹת טו, א). הִנֵּה
לוֹ לְאָמַר "נְשִׁיר", כִּי מִנְּשֵׂה
וַיִּשְׁרְאוּ הַמְּשֹׁרְרִים.

אָבַל אָמַר "אֲשִׁירָה לַה'", שְׁעָלָה
עַל כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ
מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְכִיוּן לְמָה שְׁאָמַר
חֲבִירוֹ, וְכוּלָם כִּיּוּנוֹ לְמָה שְׁאָמַר
מִנְּשֵׂה. כִּי כוּלָם נִכְלְלוּ בּוֹ . . .
שְׁנִשְׁמוּתֵיהֶם הֵם נִיצוּצוֹת
מִנְּשֵׁמָתוֹ.

אִם כֵּן, אֵין מִן הַתִּמָּא שְׁכִיּוּנוֹ
לְמָה שְׁאָמַר.

"I will sing to G-d" (Exodus 15:1). The text should have read, "We will sing to G-d," for Moses and the Jews sang.

It means that everyone was elevated to the point of accessing their . This enabled them to tune in to what the others were saying and, collectively, tune in to what Moses was saying. For they were all included in the soul of Moses. . . . Their souls were part of his soul.

From this perspective, it is no wonder that they could tune in to his words.

Though everyone sang as one, it was only because Moses inspired their unity by initiating the song.



TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 31, p. 71*

עַל יְדֵי נְשַׁפְּתַח מִנְּשֵׁה רַבֵּינוּ אֶת שִׁירַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, נְשַׁמְּרַת
הַשִּׁירָה נְשַׁלְּהֵם בְּאֶה עַל יָדוֹ וּבְכוּחוֹ, הֲרִי זֶה פְּעַל נְשַׁמְּרַת
הַשִּׁירָה עַל יְדֵי "כָּל הַדּוֹר" תִּהְיֶה בְּהַשְׁתַּוּוֹת גְּמוּרָה (כְּפִי נְשַׁהֵם
כְּלוּלִים בְּמִנְּשֵׁה), כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד, "בְּלֹא . . . הַשְׁתַּנּוּת וְהַפְּרָדָה".

By opening the chant, Moses initiated and empowered the ensuing chant of the people. This made it possible for the people to sing in complete unison (activating their collective state as their souls existed within Moses), singing as one person with no difference or separation.

LAYERS OF UNITY

1. When one chants and all affirm
2. When one chants and all repeat
3. When one initiates and everyone chants together



THE FOURTH LAYER

Is the highest form
of unity when one
speaks for all?

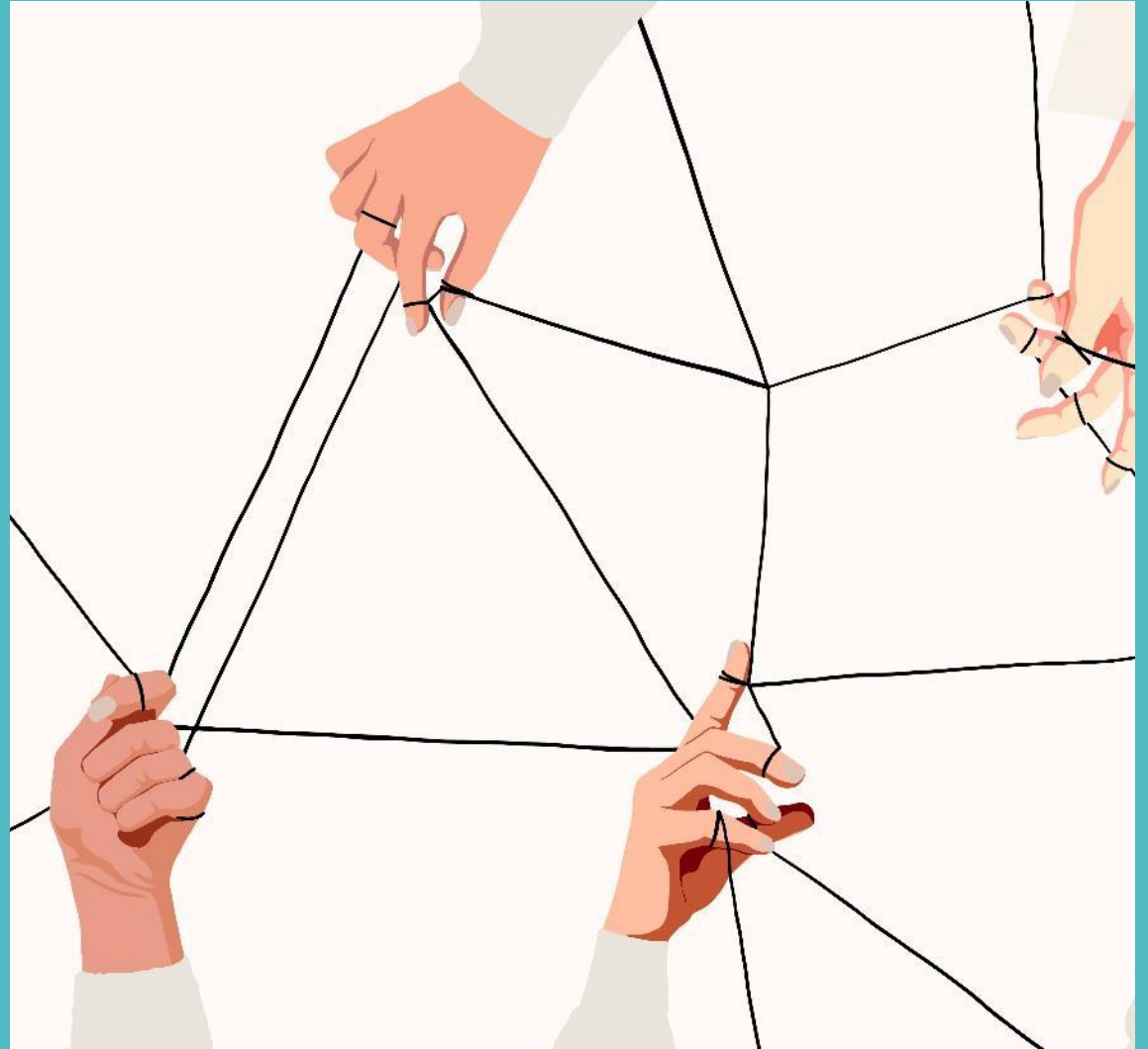
TEXT 7

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, Shulchan
Aruch HaRav, Orach
Chayim 213:6*

וְשֶׁהוּא נֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁלִיחַ לְכָלֵּם לְהוֹצִיאֵם יְדֵי חוֹבְתָן, וְכָלֵּם
מִקְיָמֵימם מְצִוֹת הַבְּרָכָה עַל יָדוֹ. וְכֵאלוֹ כְּלָם מִבְּרָכִים
בְּרָכָה אַחַת הַיּוֹצֵא מִפִּי הַמְּבָרֵךְ, שֶׁפִּיּוֹ כְּפִיהֶם.

The cantor becomes the congregation's agent, discharging their obligation by proxy. It is as if everyone recites the single blessing that emerges from the cantor's mouth, for his mouth is like their mouths.

True unity occurs
when all participate.



TEXT 8

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, ibid., 201:5*

וְעוֹנָה "אָמֵן" כְּמוֹצֵיא בְּרָכָה מִפִּיו.

Replying with amen is the equivalent
of saying the entire blessing.

RABBI ELIEZER

- Believed everyone repeated the entire *shirah* after Moses.
- Expression through speech.

RABBI AKIVA

- Full unity required Moses alone to lead the song.
- Believed repeating may cause division.

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 31, p. 72*

רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא סְבִירָא לִיהּ שְׂאֲמִירַת כָּל הַשִּׁירָה עַל יְדֵי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל (בְּפָנָי
עֲצָמָם) מִמְעֻטָּת מִדְּרַגַּת הָאֲחָדוּת שְׁעַל יְדֵי אֲמִירָה אַחַת דְּמִלְּשָׁה.

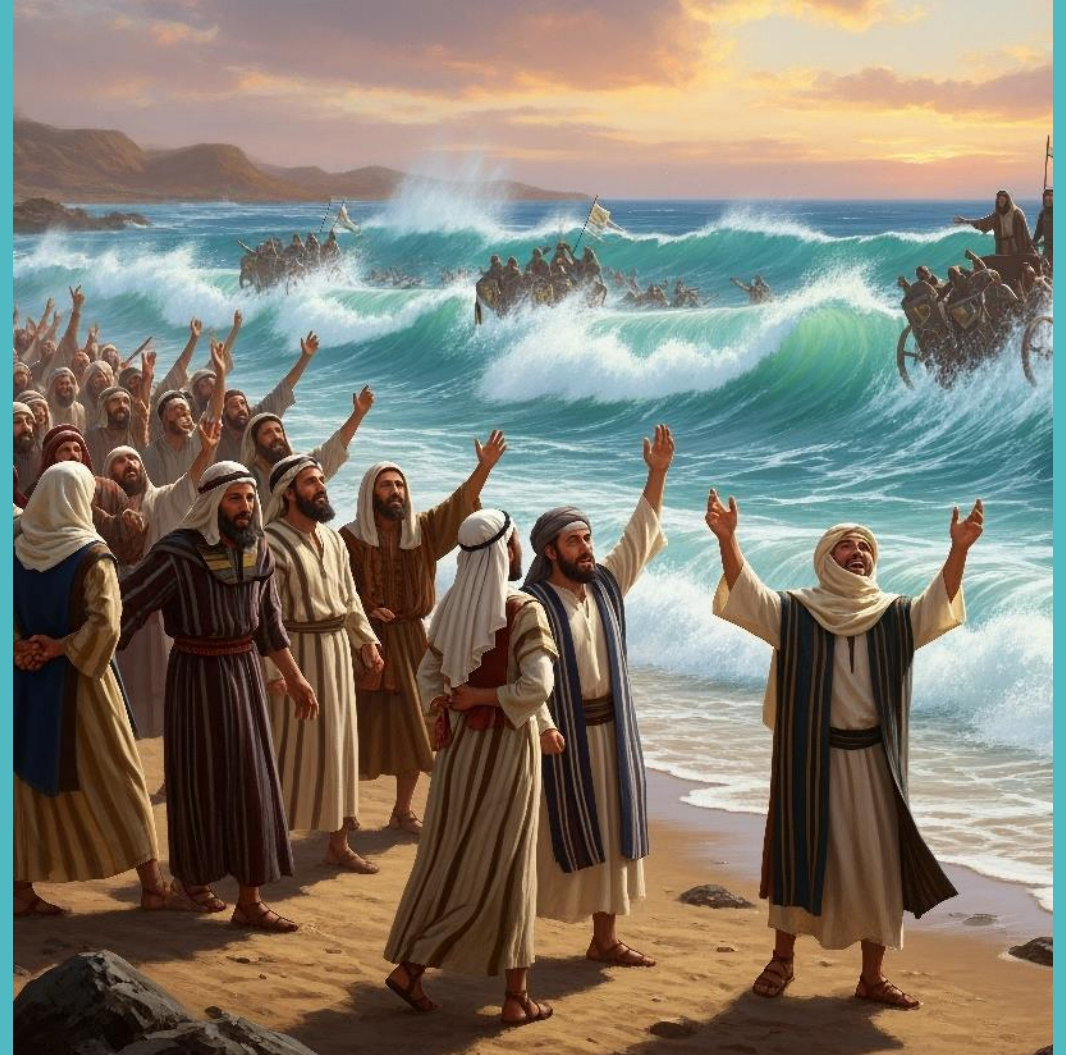
וְרַבִּי אֶלְיעֶזֶר סְבִירָא לִיהּ שְׂאֲפִשֵׁר לְאֲחָדוּת זוּ לְהַתְּגַלּוֹת בְּמִצִּיאוֹת
(וְאֲמִירַת) בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲבָל רַק כְּשִׁנְרִגְשׁ שְׁהִיא בָּאָה בְּדֶרֶךְ "מְעֻנָּה"
לְשִׁירַת מִלְּשָׁה.

Rabbi Akiva thought each person chanting the ode is a lower level of oneness than one voice—Moses—chanting for all.

Rabbi Eliezer believed that Jewish oneness could be expressed when each speaks for themselves, so long as they sense Moses prompting their words.

RABBI NECHEMIAH

- Each Jew sang individually but with one shared inspiration.
- They all sang the same words simultaneously.
- Their thoughts and feelings were aligned.



TEXT 10A

*Midrash, Mechilta,
Beshalach, Parshah 1*

מִנְּשָׂה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִנְּשָׂה שְׁקוּל כְּנֶגְדַּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁקוּלִים כְּמִנְּשָׂה בְּשִׁעָה שְׁאֲמָרוּ שִׁירָה.

Moses [sang the ode together with] the Children of Israel. As they sang the ode, Moses was equivalent to all the Israelites and all the Israelites were equivalent to Moses.

משה הוא ישראל



ישראל הם משה

Embles þu þu gættat hæt wæs eintess
þæt kómtæ it hæs in eisdiof dæ hies.

TEXT 10B

*Rabbi Avraham David
Moshe Ashkenazi,
Mirkevet Hamishneh,
ad loc.*

נְשֵׁהוּשְׁפַע רוּחַ הַקּוֹדֶשׁ בְּשִׁירָה בְּשִׁוּוֹ.

[Moses and the people] were inspired in equal measure by the spirit of saintliness.



THE MOST INTENSE UNITY

A lasting oneness that
embraces individuality.

Despite our many differences, we are one people, united by the collective soul.





THE REBBE

was the collective soul
of our generation.

ANSWERS

1. The three opinions about how the Jews sang teach us about the three levels of unity. The highest level, described by Rabbi Nechemiah, is when we are so profoundly united through our collective soul that even our thoughts, feelings and words are naturally aligned. This is the ultimate expression of oneness within individuality.
2. They knew all the words to the *shirah* because they experienced the third and deepest level of unity.
3. Moses, who embodied the collective soul, needed to start them off to initiate that unity.

KEY POINTS

1. The Jewish people and Moses sang an ode to G-d. There are three opinions: (A) Moses sang, and everyone responded with the equivalent of amen. (B) Moses led them word for word. (C) Moses opened the song, and all joined in singing the exact words Moses was about to sing.
2. We were initially a single collective soul. Though we differentiated from that soul, our souls are still united. Unity occurs when we prioritize the soul over the body.
3. It is difficult to tune in to our oneness, but in every generation, there is one Jew who embodies the collective soul. In this person's presence, we are empowered to plug in.
4. Moses had a collective soul, and in his presence, the Jews felt a sense of unity. The question was how deep it drilled down. These are the three opinions: (A) Enough for all to say amen. (B) Enough for all to sing the exact words. (C) Enough for all to think the same thoughts. The last option means we are one even when we think for ourselves. This is the unity that unites us as one nation, despite our many disagreements and differences.

