

## *The Jewish Woman's Song* by the author of the *Bilvavi series*

### *What Are Women Doing All Day in Gan Eden?*

We all received the Torah at Har Sinai. *[And we celebrate this receiving of the Torah on the festival of Shavuos]*. Since Har Sinai, Jewish men spend their time learning the Torah. What is the equivalent “women’s Torah”? “Do not forsake the Torah of your mother.” What does this mean? What Torah did your mother learn? She didn’t learn *Gemara* or *Zohar*. In order to answer this question, we must explore deeper the concept of *Gan Eden*. In other words, after Shavuos ends, what do the women take from it for the rest of the year?

When a person dies, they go to *Gan Eden*. But what do we all do in *Gan Eden*? And specifically, what do the women do in *Gan Eden*? Exploring this will help us understand what women’s Torah is and what part of Torah will remain with them after Shavuos is over.

### *The Song of Miriam*

The Torah is replete with stories, many of which are very applicable to women. One reason the Torah tells us all these stories is to teach us *mussar* and good ethics from them. However, there is more to it than this.

One great story entirely focused on Jewish women is the story of Miriam, when she sang *shirah* (great song) with all the women after the splitting of the Yaf Suf. We can learn from this that this *shirah* is a record of all the miracles together throughout history which are essentially connected via a continuous chain of song. The *sefarim hakedoshim* teach that this *shirah* continues to be sung in a special chamber in Gan Eden. ***This women’s choir*** in Gan Eden is headed by Miriam. The fact that this *shirah* - this song which was conducted by Miriam - is continuing means that the great miracles that happened to the Jewish people didn’t end with the splitting of the sea. Rather, the miracles continue as the song of Miriam continues to be sung.

How does this *shirah* relate to a woman’s Torah? Because ‘*shirah*’ is also one of the names of the Torah. This [suggests that one aspect of the Torah is song.] And this aspect of *shirah* is the women’s Torah, the aspect of Torah that women “practice” since Har Sinai. Whereas men learn Torah, women “sing” the Torah. Our mothers’ *shirah* continues on.

*Though* women are exempt from learning Torah, they relate to Torah and teach it through their *shirah*, their song. A man is not allowed to hear a woman singing. The deep reason behind this is because a woman’s special *Avodah* is *shirah*, which is not a man’s *Avodah*, and thus, a man is not allowed to “hear” a woman’s song.

### *So what is shirah?*

What does it mean to “sing” Torah? *The Hebrew word shirah* is linked to the Hebrew word *sharsheres*, which means “chain” (Maybe that’s why women like to wear chains!). *[In the context of Torah, a “chain” refers to an episode in Jewish history, made up by links in the chain represented by various events.]* A *shirah* is thus sung at when a “chain” is complete. ***Shirah is the point at which the historical event has been played out, the episode is complete and the women can sing about the positive outcome, with hindsight.***

For example, at the time when Yosef was sold into slavery, this event seemed like the worst thing possible. However, after reading about the subsequent events, we can see how this original, apparently negative event led to Yosef being second in command and saving his brothers and people from famine. A woman sings when she reaches a point of genuine realization, understanding and gratitude to Hashem in seeing that the details and events of history are vital links in a chain.

In other words, by contemplating their lives with emunah, a woman is able to come to sing *shirah*.

### *Reflecting About Your Life*

*Shirah* is a song of recognition, appreciation and pure joy for the journey and for seeing the distance one has travelled in life. In order to appreciate the chain of history and be brought to *shirah*, a woman must reflect on see how all the events in his life and how they connect. For instance, a woman may reflect back to the time when she was a baby and she cried and all the challenges and growth moments she faced before reaching her wedding day. But then she gets married and sings out of joy.

### *The Greatness of Women*

Miriam was the one who began the *shirah*. She was also the one who was responsible for Moshe's birth and survival [*She convinced her parents to reunite and this led to Moshe being born. And she protected him and ensured he would survive in the river.*] I Thus, if not for Miriam, there would be no Redemption! This is the depth behind why "in the merit of the righteous women, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt." If not for Miriam, there would be no Moshe!

Miriam's name comes from the word *merirus*, bitterness. When Miriam sang the *shirah*, she was alluding to the fact that although the Jewish people first went through bitterness in Egypt, now they were singing. In a certain way, the song of Miriam is greater than the Torah which Moshe gave! This is because it is written, "*Az yashir Moshe*" – "Then, Moshe sang." The men only sing after the miracles are complete. The *Gemara* also states that *Az Yashir* is a song of the future, in which Moshe will lead all the men to sing. But Miriam was singing with the women even before the people had witnessed the *yeshua* "*Vatashar Miriam*" - "And Miriam sang" is in past tense." Thus the women acted with emunah, faith before they could even experience the salvation. This is a perfect example of a woman's role in the Torah. Just as Miriam and the women sang *shirah* by the sea to prepare the people to receive the Torah, so too every Jewish woman can provide her family with Torah by singing the *shirah*.

### *Making Time to Reflect*

Chazal state that Moshiach will reveal a "new Torah." What is the Torah that Moshiach will reveal? He will reveal the entire story of the Jewish people throughout history, and this will show us the great chain of events that will lead us to *shirah*.

Every woman should take some time every day to reflect: "What has happened to me since the time I was born? What were the major events and stages I went through in my life?" Then she can reflect on how Hashem was there with her at every stage and provided salvation.

This process of reflection and contemplation would reveal the "chain" of events in our life. Recognizing this chain reveals Hashem's guidance and *hashgacha pratis*, which in turn leads us to *shirah*.

This process is similar to what the Chofetz Chaim did one day when he sat down and went through his entire life in his head, thanking Hashem for all that he had in his life. He spoke to Hashem, saying, “Hashem, thank you for letting me learn Torah my entire life. Thank you for meriting me that I write sefer *Mishnah Berurah*. Thank you for my wife and for the children You gave me.”

When a person takes time to contemplate the chain of events in her life, she will become more aware of how Hashem has always been there in her life. This process should not just be a lip service but a deep and true reflection into Hashem’s kindness and protection. In turn, this can bring one to such a state of gratitude that your heart will burst out with song to Hashem.

This is the “Torah of your mother”. This is the Torah which a mother must give to her children – she teaches them how to sing *shirah* about everything in life, to see how all the seemingly disparate events in their lives link together and form one chain. This is the true song, the bedtime lullaby that a mother sings to her children!

### *A Woman’s Torah Comes From Within*

Men’s Torah is usually derived from an external source, such as from a sefer or the Beis Midrash. But a woman does not need to rely on an external source to obtain her Torah. She doesn’t need a sefer or a Beis Midrash. Her Torah comes from within herself. Just as Chazal teach that “Avraham learned Torah from himself.” Avraham Avinu knew [what Hashem] wanted [and knew Torah] without actually receiving it from an external source. [It was inside of him, his tzelem *Elokai mimal*] So too women have the ability to obtain the Torah from their hearts and souls. It is written, “*Write the words of Torah on your heart.*” This can refer to the women’s Torah which is derived from their hearts.

### *A unique chain, a unique shirah*

When a person wants to buy a new chain, she might go to a jewelry store. She asks the shopkeeper to show her a special chain that is completely unique. Similarly, the “chain” which is the basis of the *shirah* of a woman’s life is also the chain which is unlike any other in the world! Every person’s life is different and thus each person has her own personal *shirah*.

When a woman has sung *shirah* during her life and then goes to *Gan Eden*, she enters that special chamber in Heaven where Miriam sings with all women. However, she does not sing the particular song that others are singing. Rather, rather she adds her own, unique song to the chorus, the song of her own life. This idea is supported by the phrase “*shirah chadasha*” – a “new song” which we can reveal. The more emunah a woman attains by reflecting on her life with joy, the greater her contribution to the chorus. Each woman can potentially turn her whole life into a chain of events that brings her to contribute a wonderful *shirah*.

### *Shirah, not crying*

Imagine that a woman wants to write a biography about her life. Potentially, she could write about her whole life and all the struggles and pain she endured. However, such a reflective exercise will not bring her to sing *shirah* about her life. Instead, it will just bring her more pain. However, if she reflects on her life with emuna and

focuses on how all the events in her life are part of one positive chain, she would break out in song. That would be a useful and *shirah*-filled biography.

We entered this world as a baby crying. How will we leave this world? Will we also leave the world crying? If we do, then we were born with crying and we will leave this world crying. But if we use our time in this world to contemplate our life and see the numerous kindnesses Hashem has bestowed on us, we can come to sing *shirah*, and we will end our life with song instead!

### *Practical recommendations*

In order to receive this internal, *shirah*-based form of Torah, a woman must first learn *emunah*. For instance, the *Chovos HaLevovos* first discusses *Emunah* before he discusses how to have gratitude to Hashem. It is also recommended to learn *Chovos HaLevovos: Sha'ar HaBechinah* (Gate of Reflection), with the commentary of the *Lev Tov*. This can awaken us to consider how to think about Hashem's goodness in our life.

Then, a woman must set aside regular time to reflect about all that has happened to her until now. Then she will be able to see the significant role each event played in the overall chain of her life.

Finally, , a woman can take a piece of paper and write down all the major events she experienced in her life. and think about how He saved her and brought her to her next step.

This practice can help her see the chain of events in her life and sing a unique *shirah* which is unlike any other in the world. A mother can gradually begin to include her children in her *shirah* as she expresses it. Eventually over time, her children will open up and learn themselves how to have *shirah* in their own life.

### *The Challenge*

However, at first, this process may not be so easy in practice. For instance, one might find it hard to see how certain events in one's life are useful or connect to other events. Compare this process to doing a puzzle. While completing the puzzle, one may be required to initially set aside certain pieces aside that do not seem to fit and come back to them later. Slowly, as the picture evolves, one will find where to add the missing pieces. So too, we can treat the inexplicable parts of our life like unsolvable puzzle pieces and put them aside temporarily. Eventually, we will see that these hard-to-understand-events also have their place in the overall puzzle. When completing this exercise, it is important to remember that everything you experience in life is *[from Hashem and plays]* a vital role in your life. *[This understanding will hopefully grant you the patience and persistence required to come back to the events you initially did not grasp and]* you will be able to incorporate them into the full picture.

### *Tehillim – The Ultimate Song*

The whole of *Sefer Tehillim* is actually a *shirah*. It is the song of Dovid *HaMelech's* life, a chain of events that *[occurred in his life and that]* he connected together. Thus, if a woman says *Tehillim* with heartfelt *kavana* (intention), she can connect to the *shirah* within it and express her Torah.

*Tehillim* is the ultimate *shirah*, because it is the all-inclusive song of the Jewish people. After we discover our own personal song in our life, we can strive to connect ourselves to the *shirah* of *Tehillim*.

### *Preparing for Shavuos*

In order for a woman to adequately prepare for Shavuos, she should be able to clearly identify what is a woman's Torah. She should understand that a woman's Torah (which women continue to sing in *Gan Eden*) is the *shirah*. If a woman never reveals a *shirah* about her life, ***contemplating the events and how they were all necessary in order to lead her in her tafkid and to her current place, then she will not be able to sing Shirah in Gan Eden!*** Imagine a person who comes to a wedding but does not understand the language spoken there. She will surely not enjoy the wedding to the same extent. To be able to enjoy the full, spiritual pleasure of *Gan Eden*, we need to understand and be familiar with the "language" of *shirah* already in this world.

### *In Conclusion*

[The Torah that women received from Har Sinai and can pass onto her children is *shirah*.] *Shirah* is singing a song of praise and ecstasy to Hashem reached by tracing and linking all the disparate events in our lives as leading to our present situation]. Seeking out our own personal *shirah* is a crucial requirement for women who want to live an inner kind of life.

Note that these are not simply theoretical ideas! Rather, these instructions teach us what a woman's Torah is all about and we must put them into practice.

May we each merit to reveal our own personal, deep *shirah*. And may all of our songs come together ***in harmony*** and reveal the complete *shirah*, the song of Creation.

