

Perek Shira

RABBI ADIN EVEN-ISRAEL STEINSALTZ



PEREK SHIRA

COMMENTARY BY

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel
Steinsaltz

STEINSALTZ CENTER

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Perek Shira

Commentary by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

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אֲבָל שְׂאֵל נָא בַּהֲמוֹת וְתִרְדֹּף וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְגַד־לָךְ. אוֹ שִׁיחַ לְאֶרֶץ וְתִרְדֹּף וַיִּסְפְּרוּ לָךְ דְּגַי הַיָּם. מִי לֹא יָדַע בְּכָל אֵלֶּה כִּי יַד ה' עָשְׂתָה זֹאת. אֲשֶׁר בִּידוֹ נִפְשׁ כָּל־חַי וְרוּחַ כָּל בֶּשֶׂר אִישׁ.

But ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds in the heavens and they will tell you, or speak to the earth and it will teach you or let the fish in the sea relate to you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In His hand is the life of every creature and the spirit of all of mankind.

(Job 12:7–10)

In memory of

Barbara Ann Grosse

a devoted teacher of young children for thirty years and a compassionate soul who believed with all her heart that education starts from the very beginning of life and never ends.

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Toronto, Canada



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz used to say that he had goals and plans for the next hundred years. As a part of those plans – his life's work – Rabbi Steinsaltz wanted to make more of the spiritual treasures of the Jewish people available to a wider Jewish audience, both in Israel and abroad. This book is one of the many dreams he hoped to realize and bring to fruition.

In the 1960s, Rabbi Steinsaltz approached several publishers with his idea of producing a commentary on *Perek Shira* accompanied by illustrations of the creations that sing in praise of their Creator. *Perek Shira* does not have the stature of the most important books in the Jewish canon. It does not occupy the same place as the Bible, the Mishna, the Gemara, the books of Maimonides, or other books published with commentaries by Rabbi Steinsaltz. Yet it is unique and significant, and Rabbi Steinsaltz wanted to highlight it in a novel way.

About a decade before his death, a small group of students gathered at the Steinsaltz Center for a series of lectures he delivered on *Perek Shira*. He intended to see these lectures transcribed and published as a book with his commentary, but despite his stated interest, work on the book did not begin until after his death, when the lectures were subsequently transcribed and edited.

In accordance with his wishes, this work is short and concise. It does not attempt to summarize all of the many commentaries written on *Perek Shira* over the years, nor does it attempt to identify the creations found herein from a precise scientific perspective. It also does not profess to have found the most original or most

authentic version of *Perek Shira* among the various versions that exist. (For this edition, we used the text that appears in the *Siddur Yaavetz*, the text most often used today.)

In his commentary, Rabbi Steinsaltz attempted to reveal, through his observation or knowledge of each creation, its connection to the verse it recites. Included in Rabbi Steinsaltz's original vision for this work was a series of illustrations that would appear alongside his explanatory words. He believed that the text itself must be enhanced for the reader – that the creations herein must be represented visually. The pictures in this book attempt to capture the life and movement of each of the creations represented and to echo the poetry of their songs.

In keeping with this vision, the artist Shāḥar Gezundheit, with the help of art editor Naomi Ben-Zimra, created the illustrations that appear in this book. The art attempts to capture each creation as it sings, as well as the gaze and interest of the human observer who is watching and listening.

According to Rabbi Steinsaltz, *Perek Shira* expresses a universal song, and the nature described in it is specific to the Land of Israel. In light of this, many of the illustrations in this book are based on nature scenes commonly found in Israel.

Rabbi Steinsaltz was an ardent lover of nature. His interest in animals, birds, flowers, and his fellow human beings had no bounds. He was intensely curious about the world and its creations, and it was an interest that was inherently respectful, intimate, and full of wonder. Some of this interest is captured in the book you are about to read.

In *Perek Shira*, each creation has a place, a physical description, and its own verse, teaching us something about its essence and the world it inhabits. In order to understand the connection between each creation and its song, Rabbi Steinsaltz attempts to enter the unique world of each animal, tree, bird, and insect.

Perek Shira seems to focus on the vast diversity and individuality of each creation – be they higher or lower life forms. But *Perek Shira* also reveals the hidden connection between this vast complex of the world's creations and God by expressing their individual praise and gratitude toward Him.

We can venture to say that this is perhaps the role of the reader of this book: to try to connect all of creation to its Source and to elevate one's own reality by adding his personal praise of the Creator to the universal praise expressed in *Perek Shira*.

We are indebted to everyone who contributed to the creation of this book: to Shaḥar Gezundheit and Naomi Ben-Zimra for their beautiful artistic interpretations, to those who attended the classes that Rabbi Steinsaltz delivered on *Perek Shira*, to those who recorded the sessions and put in the immense effort involved in transcribing them, and to the staff at Koren Publishing for their hard work and dedication to this joint effort.

We hope that this book will serve as a realization of Rabbi Steinsaltz's vision and that the music of *Perek Shira* will resonate in the hearts of its readers, enabling each of them to sing a new song to God.

INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORY OF PEREK SHIRA

Perek Shira is an ancient midrashic text comprised of songs sung by various creations to their Creator. We don't know when *Perek Shira* was written, how widely it was known, or how frequently it was recited in ancient times. It's likely that people knew about this little book and read it as early as the ninth century, at the end of the era of the geonim, but there are very few, if any, references to *Perek Shira* from that period of time. The first unequivocal reference appears in Ramban's commentary to the book of Job, where "the secret of *Perek Shira*" (Job 38:36) is mentioned. After that, other references to *Perek Shira* appeared with greater frequency.

The first commentary on *Perek Shira* was written by Rabbi Shmuel Kimchi of Provence, who lived more than a century after the Ramban. By then, *Perek Shira* was widely known in Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewish communities throughout Spain, the Middle East, and Europe.

In the sixteenth century, *Perek Shira* began to be acknowledged as an important work. Safed was the center of Jewish learning at that time. Rabbi Moshe bar Yosef Matrani, or the Mabit, one of the most renowned rabbis in Safed, wrote the first widely known commentary on *Perek Shira* in that era. The fact that his commentary was written during the same period of time that Rabbi Yosef Karo of Safed wrote the *Shulhan Arukh* attests to the importance of *Perek Shira*.

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From then on, scholars began to study *Perek Shira*, many more handwritten and published commentaries appeared, and references to it multiplied. Additional evidence regarding the acceptance of *Perek Shira* as an important work was that it began to appear in prayer books, including well-known and highly esteemed editions.

Perek Shira was added to the prayer books as a supplement worthy of contemplation from time to time, though it was not treated as a required addition to the daily prayers. Yet *Perek Shira* began to appear in so many prayer books, with or without commentary, that it became conventional for all members of the congregation to recite it.

There are now more than one hundred commentaries on *Perek Shira*. Some approach the text as allegory or metaphor, some see it from a mystical perspective, and others understand it according to its plain meaning.

ITS CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

The structure of *Perek Shira* is repetitive and consistent: It lists diverse creations in this world, followed by the verses they “sing” to God. The list of creations and creatures is so comprehensive that it is hard to think of a category that is not represented. From physical creatures, such as lions or bears, to forces of nature like the seas or clouds, to abstract entities like night and day – everything in creation has its own song.

Almost all of these songs are verses from the Bible. *Perek Shira* is divided into chapters, with each chapter dedicated to a specific category of creations. All versions of this work have appendices written in the language of the Mishna, though the sources of these supplements are not entirely clear.

THE MANY VERSIONS OF PEREK SHIRA

There are many versions of *Perek Shira*, probably because of its wide circulation in numerous locations throughout its history. These versions are not substantially different from each other, yet there is no agreement about one true specific version.

The main difference between the versions is the order of the chapters and the order of songs within them. Some versions divide the book into six chapters and some into seven, according to the days of the week. A good part of the book is consistently the same, but there are sections that appear only in certain versions.

Differences in versions can be attributed to the fact that for many years *Perek Shira* was not considered part of the canon or attributed to a specific individual. Like many other additions to the prayer book, *Perek Shira* took on a life of its own, and over the years it was used in different ways for prayer and study.

Jews have treated it as a serious work, worthy of study and contemplation. Devout, God-fearing supplicants have extended their traditional prayers with meditations on *Perek Shira*, and scholars have studied it. Kabbalists have found hidden meanings in it that relate to higher worlds. When something that seems completely familiar is seen from an unusual and totally different perspective, our souls can be awakened to introspection and prayer in a new way. This may be the reason *Perek Shira* has found a lasting place in Jewish prayer books.

CORE THEMES AND CONCEPTS

The core theme of *Perek Shira* – that creations praise their Creator – is not a new idea. Verses of this sort are found throughout the Bible. The book of Psalms has several chapters that focus entirely on praise to God by creations of the world. These chapters from Psalms include not only praise from creatures whose vocalizations can be interpreted as calls to their Creator, but they also include the voices of silent entities, such as mountains and hills, which sing out in praise of God.

This is the essential idea of *Perek Shira*: that all creatures, not only humans, have their own way of expressing gratitude and praise for their Creator. *Perek Shira* takes this idea and amplifies it in scope and detail.

The list of creatures singing God's praises is longer in *Perek Shira* than anywhere in the Bible, and the itemization of the different elements within the broader categories is also unique to *Perek Shira*. In the Bible, the "legions of the heavens" praise God as a group. In *Perek Shira*, every element within each group has its own

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individual song to sing. This fresh perspective of *Perek Shira* explains the unique significance it holds as a serious addition to preceding biblical and rabbinic texts that were written in praise of God.

In *Perek Shira*, each of God's creations sings its own unique song, a verse chosen for it specifically. The verses are not abstract and do not tend to be a general praise of God. Each verse praises Him in a way that has a special significance for the one who sings it, and each expression of praise differs from the others.

Like any great work, *Perek Shira* deals with the individual and his inner world while also expressing universal themes. More than once, the song of an individual creature praises God in a way that reflects its own life and the nature of its pain and passions. All of this is communicated in concentrated form, through just one verse, usually from the Bible.

This way of understanding *Perek Shira* inevitably affects its interpretation, since the attempt to understand it simply, by connecting each creature to its verse without the help of exegeses, commentary, or a mystical perspective raises several fundamental problems.

IDENTIFYING THE CREATIONS

Many generations have passed since this book was written, and many names of trees, animals, and birds have been forgotten or are unfamiliar to us. It's often difficult, even impossible, to correctly identify animals and plants that appear in the Bible or in the writings of the Sages, which has both halakhic and scholarly implications. The differences between the ancient world and our own and the consequent gaps in knowledge about specific creatures make *Perek Shira* difficult to understand fully. We can only speculate as to why certain creatures are included in this book or why specific verses were selected for them. In order to understand what each song in *Perek Shira* is trying to express, we must resort to biblical commentaries and interpretations of the Sages.

Books of the Bible generally don't describe the many life forms or landscapes in our world in detail. Entire worlds exist that are not described in concrete terms in the Bible; they are seemingly not a part of the biblical portrayal of

our world. *Perek Shira* seems to fill in the biblical picture by including creations and creatures that do not appear to have a place in the Bible. In this book they are given words and even personalities as *Perek Shira* attempts to express the feelings of all of God's creations.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The question that accompanies us from the first page onward is how to understand this book. Are we expected to take it literally? Many commentators see the praises sung by the various creations herein as the playful thoughts of a human being observing nature. These verses could also be seen as comments that are appropriate for human beings to think and say. On deeper contemplation, one could say that even though most of the creations in this book don't have intelligence, reasoning, or speech, their essence is expressed by their very existence.

For generations, human beings have debated a great question: Are we unique in our ability to speak, or do other creatures also communicate with language? The answer, of course, depends on how we define language, how we define communication, and how human beings relate to the natural world. Does the sparrow really know what it is saying? Or is praise of God expressed by its very existence?

These questions are part of the background of *Perek Shira*, which doesn't provide us with simple answers. In a certain sense, that is part of its charm. Fundamental questions remain unaddressed and unanswered.

When all is said and done, *Perek Shira* is a symphony – a multifaceted, nuanced work that connects creation as a whole to God detail by detail, creation by creation. The poetry expressed in this little book leaves room for one's own unique human voice, one's own distinctive essence, to be added to the universal, collective song of creation.

PRAYER RECITED BEFORE *PEREK SHIRA*

It is taught that Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: I testify that whoever engages in *Perek Shira* every day in this world will be destined for the World to Come, and he will be protected from evil occurrences, from the evil inclination, from harsh judgment, from the Satan, from every kind of destruction, and from all who cause harm. [The Holy One, blessed be He, says to a person who studies *Perek Shira* every day:] “Commit with all your heart and all

your soul to know My ways, to safeguard the doors to My Sanctuary and My Torah, and to observe My commandments and decrees. Keep My Torah in your heart and the fear of God before your eyes. Guard your mouth and your tongue from all transgression and guilt, and I shall be with you wherever you go, and I shall teach you wisdom and understanding in all things.”

Know that everything created by the Holy One, blessed be He, was created for His glory alone, as the verse states, “Everything that is called by My name and for My glory I created it, I fashioned it; truly, I made it” (Isaiah 43:7).

תְּנִיָּא רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַגָּדוֹל אוֹמֵר: כָּל הָעוֹסֵק
בְּפֶרֶק שִׁירָה זֶה בְּכָל יוֹם מַעֲיֵד אֲנִי עָלָיו שֶׁהוּא
בֶּן הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְנוֹצֵל מִפְּגַע רָע וּמִיֵּצֵר הָרַע
וּמִדִּין קָשָׁה וּמִשְׁטָן וּמִכָּל מִיָּנִי מִשְׁחִית וּמִדִּיקִין.
גָּמוֹר בְּכָל לִבָּבָהּ וּבְכָל נִפְשָׁהּ לְדַעַת דְּרָכֵי, וְלִשְׁמֹר
דְּלִתוֹת הַיְכָלִי וְתוֹרָתִי, וְלִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וְחֻקֵּי. נִצּוֹר
תּוֹרָתִי בְּלִבָּבָהּ וּנְגִיד עֵינֶיהָ תִּהְיֶה יִרְאָתִי. שְׁמֹר
פִּיהָ וּלְשׁוֹנָהּ מִכָּל חֲטָא וְאַשְׁמָה, וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ
בְּכָל מְקוֹם שֶׁתֵּלֵךְ וְאַלְמֹדֶךְ שָׁכַל וּבִינָה מְכָל דְּבָר.
וְהוּא יוֹדֵעַ שָׁכַל מֶה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לֹא
בָּרָא כִּי אִם לְכְבוֹדוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר “כָּל הַנִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁמִי
וְלְכְבוֹדִי בָּרָאתִיו יִצְרָתִיו אֶף עֲשִׂיתִיו” (ישעיה מג, ז):

Rebbi [Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi] said: Whoever studies *Perek Shira* in this world will merit learning, teaching, observing, performing, and fulfilling the Torah, and his Torah study will remain with him. He will be protected from the evil inclination, from evil occurrences, from castigation in the grave, from a verdict of Gehenna, and from the birth pangs of the Messiah. He will live a long life and be privileged to see the days of the Messiah and life in the World to Come.

It is taught that Rabbi Eliezer said: Whoever recites this song in this world will merit reciting it in the World to Come, as the verse states, “Then Moses will sing” (Exodus 15:1). It does not say that Moses “sang,” but rather that he “will sing” – in the future.

אָמַר רַבִּי: כָּל הָעוֹסֵק בְּפֶרֶק שִׁירָה בְּעוֹלָם
הַזֶּה זֹכֶה לְלַמּוֹד וּלְלַמֵּד לְשִׁמּוֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת וּלְקַיֵּם,
וְתַלְמוּדוֹ מִתְקַיֵּם בְּיָדוֹ, וְנוֹצֵל מִיֵּצֵר הָרָע וּמִפְּגַע
רָע וּמִחֲבוּט הַקָּבֶר וּמִדִּינָה שֶׁל גִּיהֵנָם וּמִחֲבָלוֹ
שֶׁל מָשִׁיחַ, וּמֵאֲרִיךְ יָמִים וְזֹכֶה לִימֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ
וּלְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

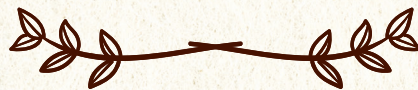
תַּנְיָא אָמַר רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר: כָּל הָאוֹמֵר שִׁירָה
זוּ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה זֹכֶה וְאוֹמְרוֹ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, שְׁנֵאֲמַר
”אֲזַיִר מֹשֶׁה” (שְׁמוֹת טו, א), ”נָשַׁר” לֹא נֶאֱמַר אֶלָּא
”יִשִּׁיר”. מְלַמֵּד שֶׁעֲתִיד לִזְמַר (אוֹתוֹ) לְעֵתִיד לְבֹא:

Our Rabbis said of David, king of Israel, may peace be upon him: When he completed the book of Psalms, he felt proud and said to the Holy One, blessed be He, “Have You created any creature in Your world that says songs and praises more than I?” At that moment, a frog appeared to him and said, “David, do not be so pleased with yourself. Not only do I say more songs and praises than you do, but three thousand parables can be derived from every song that I sing, as it is written, ‘He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were one thousand and five’ (I Kings 5:12). Not only that, but I am involved in a great *mitzva*, and this is the *mitzva* in which I am involved:

There is a sea creature that sustains itself only in water. When it is hungry, it seizes me and devours me, enabling me to fulfill the commandment ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread, and if thirsty, give him water to drink, as you are raking coals on his head and the Lord will reward you’ (Proverbs 25:21–22). Do not read ‘He will reward you’ but rather ‘He will cause him to make peace with you’ (see *Yalkut Shimoni*, end of *Tehillim*).”

אָמרו רבֹּותינו זְכוֹנָם לְבָרְכָהּ (ילקוט שמעוני
סוף תהלים) עַל דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם,
בְּשַׁעַה שְׁסִים סֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים זָחָה דַּעְתּוֹ עָלָיו,
וְאָמַר לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: “רְבוּנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם
יֵשׁ בְּרִיָּה שֶׁבְּרָאֶת בְּעוֹלָמָהּ שְׁאוּמֶרֶת שִׁירוֹת
וְתִשְׁבָּחוֹת יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנִּי”. בָּאוּתָּהּ שָׁעָה נִזְדַּמְּנָה לוֹ
צִפְרִידַע אַחַת, וְאָמְרָה לוֹ: “דָּוִד אַל תִּזְוֹחַ דַּעְתָּךְ
עָלַי, שְׁאֲנִי אוֹמֶרֶת שִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבָּחוֹת יוֹתֵר מִמֶּךָ,
וְלֹא עוֹד אֵלָּא כָּל שִׁירָה שְׁאֲנִי אוֹמֶרֶת מִמִּשְׁלַת
עָלַי שְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים מִשְׁלִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר ‘וַיִּדְבֹּר
שְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים מִשְׁלֵי וַיְהִי שִׁירוֹ חֲמִשָּׁה וְאֵלֶּף’
(מלכים א ה, יב). וְלֹא עוֹד אֵלָּא שְׁאֲנִי עוֹסֶקֶת בְּמִצְוָה
גְּדוֹלָה, וְזוֹ הִיא הַמִּצְוָה שְׁאֲנִי עוֹסֶקֶת בָּהּ, יֵשׁ
בְּשִׁפְתַּי הַיּוֹם מִן אֶחָד שְׁאִין פִּרְנָסָתוֹ כִּי אִם מִן
הַמִּים, וּבְשַׁעַה שֶׁהוּא רָעֵב נוֹטְלֵנִי וְאוֹכְלֵנִי. זֶה
הִיא הַמִּצְוָה, לִקְיָם מֶה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר ‘אִם רָעֵב שִׁנְאַךָ
הֲאִכִּילָהוּ לֶחֶם וְאִם צָמֵא הִשְׁקֵהוּ מַיִם, כִּי גִחְלִים
אֶתָּה חֲתָה עַל רֹאשׁוֹ וְה’ יִשְׁלֶם לָךְ’ (משלי כה, כא
כב), אַל תִּקְרִי ‘יִשְׁלֶם לָךְ’ אֵלָּא ‘יִשְׁלִימֵנוּ לָךְ’.”

CHAPTER ONE



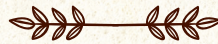
The first chapter of Perek Shira highlights the great, all-encompassing phenomena of reality: the heavens and earth, paradise and hell, deserts and fields, seas and rivers.



שָׁמַיִם אֹמְרִים: "הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה
יָדָיו מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ"

The heavens say: "The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the skies tell the work of His hands."

(Psalms 19:2)



The heavens encompass everything in the entire cosmos, including the sun, moon, and the stars, each of which appear later in the chapter, each with its own verse and song. The Sages sometimes refer to these celestial bodies as "the army of the heavens," and each entity has a unique and specific role.

In contrast to the celestial orbs, the sky itself serves a more general role. Though it is vast, distant, and cosmic in nature, it is visible above. Just by gazing up at the skies, one can see evidence of the supremacy and greatness of God.

This is expressed in the words of its song. Unlike other creations that appear in *Perek Shira*, the song of the heavens is not comprised of the words of praise that they utter but rather express their very nature: "**The heavens declare the glory of God**" – the very fact that they exist is evidence of the supreme greatness of God. "**And the skies tell the work of His hands**" – the vast expanse of the skies above in itself reveals that it is the work of His hands.



אָרֶץ אֹמֶרֶת: "לֹה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ תִּבֵּל וַיֵּשְׁבִי בָּהּ"

The earth says: "The earth is the Lord's, and all that it holds, the world and all its inhabitants." (Psalms 24:1)

וְאוֹמֵר: "מִכַּנֵּף הָאָרֶץ וּמִרֵּחַ שָׁמַעְנוּ צְבִי לַצְדִּיק"

It also says: "From the edge of the earth we heard songs: Magnificence to the righteous." (Isaiah 24:16)



Heaven and earth comprise two great parts of reality, each encompassing countless diverse creations. The songs sung by heaven and earth are of a general nature. The earth's song includes everything that exists on the face of the earth – all of its inhabitants, as well as everything within it. The song attests to the miracle of the earth's existence, how it is both rooted and suspended in the universe.

In contrast to other songs in *Perek Shira*, the earth's song comprises two different verses. "**The earth is the Lord's, and all that it holds, the world and all its inhabitants**" is a basic declaration that the entire world, the very existence of the earth and all that it contains, belongs to God. The second verse, "**From the edge of the earth we heard songs: Magnificence to the righteous,**" is more like that of other songs in *Perek Shira* in that it is more personal, its content more specific. It describes a full-throated song that emanates from everywhere on the planet, from forgotten desolate places in the far corners of the earth to places teeming with life.

The phrase "**magnificence to the righteous**" at the end of the verse is somewhat obscure. On one hand, it could be understood as referring to the righteous of the earth, whose existence and the way they live their lives add magnificence and beauty to the earth's song. On the other hand, it could refer to God, who is sometimes called "the Righteous One of the world" (see *Bereshit Rabba* 49). Understood in this way, praise emanating from all corners of the earth express the glory of God, whose greatness is revealed and magnified by the song of the earth.



גַּן עֵדֶן אָמַר: "עוֹרֵי צָפוֹן וּבֹאִי תִימָן הַפִּיחִי גִנִּי יִזְלוּ
בְּשִׁמְיוֹ יבֹא דוֹדִי לִגְנוֹ וְיֹאכַל פְּרִי מִגְדִּיו"

The Garden of Eden says: "Awake, north wind, and come, south wind; blow upon my garden; its perfume will spread. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat his delicious fruits."

(Song of Songs 4:16)



Inclusion of the song of the Garden of Eden in *Perek Shira* should come as no surprise, as the Sages see it as having a place in our world. Whether it is understood to be a specific place geographically or something belonging to another realm entirely remains unclear. Either way, the Garden of Eden occupies its own little corner of reality, and so has its own song to sing.

The Garden of Eden says: "Awake, north wind, and come, south wind; blow upon my garden; its perfume will spread." Here the northern and southern winds are summoned to send breezes through the garden so that its fragrances will perfume the air. And then "my beloved" arrives: "Let my beloved come to his garden and eat his delicious fruits."

The Garden of Eden is the place where good people go after death. "My beloved" refers to someone beloved by God – someone who did what was required of him in life and who reaps the fruits of his labors in death.

"My beloved" could also refer to Adam, whom God placed in the Garden of Eden after his creation. Adam was the first human inhabitant of the garden, but in a broader sense, "my beloved" includes all of humanity, as the entire human species was created with the potential to return home to the Garden of Eden.

According to the Talmud (*Pesachim* 94a), the Garden of Eden is sixty times larger than the earth. When it opens its gates and invites people in, there is more than enough room to accommodate everyone. The song of the Garden of Eden is based on the assumption that the garden belongs to humanity and that it is the place where human beings are destined to return when the time is right. Blooming and filled with fragrance, the garden opens its gates so that mankind can come home. And then: "My beloved will come to his garden and eat his delicious fruits."