



## נושא ונישא

# The Carrier and the Carried

וְלִבְנֵי קֵהַת לֹא נָתַן כִּי עֲבַדְתָּ הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֲלֵהֶם בְּכַתֵּף יְשָׂאוּ.

*To the sons of Kehat he did not give [wagons],  
for their task involved the holy objects,  
carrying them upon their shoulders.* (Bamidbar 7,9)

### ■ The Prerequisites for Prophecy

Very few are those who have been privileged to hear the Voice of G-d speaking to them. These select individuals were chosen to reach this level of prophecy only after having been found to meet certain basic requirements, without which there can be no prophecy. The requirements are listed in the Talmud (Shabbat 30b):

**The Divine Presence does not dwell amidst sadness, laziness, scornful laughter, light-headedness, idle talk, or matters of no consequence – but only amidst the joy of mitzvah, as is written:**

*“Bring me a minstrel,” [the Prophet Elisha] said - and when the minstrel played music, the hand of G-d came upon Elisha.* (Kings II 3,15)

Before we explore the connection between music and joy, let us first ask: We see that there are six situations in which the Divine Presence does not dwell. What is their common denominator? What is the axis around which these six negative traits turn?

The answer is that they all revolve around the *goal* that must be sought and met – a goal set for us by the Creator of the world. Essentially, every mitzvah facing us at any given moment is our goal, a “mission from G-d.”

Regarding prophecy, for instance: Every prophecy is a mission, and every prophet is an emissary to Israel. The mission has a target, and the prophet must concentrate all his efforts on the mission set for him by Hashem. He must ignore all the difficulties, obstructions and pressures that stand in his way.

How can we know if a prophet is able to do this? Before a prophet is assigned his Divine mission, he must pass a test of his ability to withstand pressures and difficulties liable to prevent him from fulfilling the task. We see a blatant example in the story of the Prophet Elijah, when he was told to stand upon the mount before Hashem, where G-d was to pass:

... וְרוּחַ גְּדוּלָה וְחֶזֶק מִפְּרֹק הַרִים וּמִשִּׁבַּר סְלָעִים לְפָנָיו ה' - לֹא בְרוּחַ ה'.  
 וְאַחַר הַרוּחַ רָעַשׁ - לֹא בְרָעַשׁ ה'.  
 וְאַחַר הָרָעַשׁ אֵשׁ - לֹא בְאֵשׁ ה'.  
 וְאַחַר הָאֵשׁ - קוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה.  
 ... *A strong wind smashed the mountains and rocks before G-d,  
 [but] G-d was not in the wind; after the wind [came] an  
 earthquake - but G-d was not in the earthquake;  
 and after the earthquake, a fire – but G-d was not in the fire;  
 and after the fire, a still small voice.* (Kings I 19,11-12)

Eliyahu was put to the test of stormy winds, a tremendous earthquake, threatening flames of fire – and only after it was shown that he could stand tall before them, was he deemed worthy to attain the *still small voice* from which G-d's voice breaks out.

Let us now study each of the factors that can preclude prophecy, listed in the above-quoted Talmud passage. The first two are:

1. Sadness
2. Laziness

Sadness is expressed by the descent of the soul into itself, to the point where it loses its field of vision. It is so low, it cannot see ahead. Hollow emptiness overtakes the person's spirit, blocking his ability to perceive his ultimate destination and goal.

Laziness, on the other hand, stems from a feeling of heaviness. It is a dead weight on one's legs that prevents mobility and impedes him from advancing towards the fulfillment of his mission.

The antidote for both of these difficulties and obstructions is – happiness.

## ■ Carrying and Being Carried

The verse quoted above - *when the minstrel played music, the hand of G-d came upon him* - presents music as a means for the onset of happiness. How does this work?

One of the Levites' works of service in the Beit HaMikdash was singing, accompanied by musical instruments. The Talmud (Arachin 11a) notes several Biblical sources for the Levites' singing, including this one:

... כִּי עֲבַדְתָּ הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֲלֵהֶם בְּפִתְּי יִשְׂאוּ.

*For theirs is the work of the sanctuary, they will carry [the holy items of the Mishkan] upon their shoulders.* (Bamidbar 7,9)

The Gemara then brings evidence that the word *carry* in this case implies music, based on these verses: *שָׂאוּ זְמֶרָה וּתְנוּ תָף*, *Raise [carry] a song and sound the drum* (Psalms 81,3) and *יִשְׂאוּ קוֹלָם יְרֹנוּ*, *They will raise [carry] their voices in song* (Yeshayahu 24,14). But why do the Sages take this route? The verse in Bamidbar is clearly talking about *carrying* the Mishkan's holiest objects; the men of the Kehat family are to carry the Holy Ark and the other sacred articles on their shoulders. What, then, caused the Sages to explain this verse as referring to music?

The answer that we would like to present lies in the tremendous similarity between the Holy Ark of the Covenant and the joy of singing and music. On the one hand, the Talmud (Sotah 35a) notes that the Ark "carried its carriers" – as occurred when the People of Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, crossed the Jordan River into the Land of Israel. On the other hand, singing, too, carries those who bear it, i.e., those who sing.

The significance of this comparison is as follows: We tend to believe that as we travel with the Ark of the Covenant, we are carrying it on our shoulders – but in actuality, it is the Ark that is carrying us. It can be compared to our sense that our shoulders carry our head, when in fact it is clear to all that the head is that which carries not only the shoulders, but aids the entire body in standing straight and walking around. The head is humble, however, and allows us to mistakenly believe that it is carried by the shoulders.

The same is true with song. When we sing, it feels as if we are "carrying the tune" and lifting our voice in song. In truth, though, it is the song that lifts our spirit and raises our soul up high. This can be proven from the fact that music and singing lead us to want to dance, to lift our legs and jump in the air. Music and singing make a person "light of feet," quick, flying on the wings of the song.

This returns us to where we started: Happiness is the solution for both laziness and sadness. It lifts the spirit and enables us to see our goal, thus neutralizing the effects of sadness. And it also encourages us to move swiftly towards the goal, without laziness.

The same applies to the performance of mitzvot. We might think that we are working hard to carry out good deeds and that we bear their heavy responsibility on our shoulders – but in truth, we ourselves are actually carried on the wings of our earthly mission.

### ■ Other Obstacles

There still remain four more impediments blocking our way to the Divine spirit, according to the Talmudic passage we quoted above. They are:

3. Laughter – scorn and mockery
4. Light-headedness, leading to arrogance
5. Idle talk – distractions from that which is important
6. Engaging in matters of little or no consequence.

Freeing ourselves of these impediments can be accomplished by setting ourselves a higher goal, namely, G-d's commands. If our mission in life is to attain this goal of fulfilling the mitzvot that Hashem has assigned us, then we will succeed in overcoming all hardships, and we will gain precisely the opposite traits of the above four:

3. Respectful awe, instead of mockery.
4. We will be submissive and serious of thought, instead of light-headedness.
5. We will be concentrated and focused, instead of busy with idle talk and distractions.
6. Instead of inconsequential matters, we will be engaged in meaningful tasks.

It turns out, therefore, that the combination of *mitzvah* and *joy* creates the necessary conditions for the appearance of prophecy. Prophecy makes us emissaries for G-d's word and His mitzvot.

### ■ The Spirit of Yaakov

In this connection, the Zohar notes that throughout the years that Yaakov did not know the whereabouts of his son Yosef, he was unable to prophesize;

the spirit of the Divine Presence left him. Only when he learned that his beloved son was still alive, did the prophetic spirit return to him. This is what is meant when the Torah tells us:

... וַתְּחַי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אָבִיהֶם.

*The spirit of their father Yaakov was revived.* (B'reshit 45,27)

In short, the Zohar is telling us that Yaakov's sadness precluded the Divine Presence from hovering upon him – and the joy he felt when he “found” Yosef was the direct cause for the return of the prophetic spirit. (Zohar, Vayeshev, 120b)

We can expand on this point and see from the verses themselves what Yaakov experienced “before” and “after.” When he first heard the bitter report that Yosef had been killed by an animal, we read:

וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֹלְתָיו וַיִּשֶׂם שֶׁק בְּמַתְנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים.  
... וַיִּמָּאֵן לְהִתְנַחֵם וַיֹּאמֶר: כִּי אֶרְדֶּ אֶל בְּנֵי אָבִל שְׂאֵלָה, וַיִּבְךְּ אֶתֹּ אָבִיו.

*Yaakov tore his clothes... and mourned for his son many days.*

*... He refused to be comforted, and said:*

*“I will descend to my son in mourning to She’ol.”* (37,34-35)

We see that Yaakov is “stuck.” He is sunk in despair, and can no longer see the long-term goal: the establishment of the House of Israel. He has lost his purpose in life.

The opposite is true when he hears the thrilling news that his son has been found:

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל, רַב עוֹד יוֹסֵף בְּנֵי חַי, אֵלֶיכָה וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּטָרֵם אָמוֹת.

*He said: “My son is still alive! I will go and see him before I die.”* (45,28)

The joy has raised his soul up to a height from where he can once again see the objective: the meeting with Yosef, and the start of the fulfillment of the Covenant Between the Pieces (*Brit Bein HaBetarim*) forged long before with Avraham. Only now is Yaakov able to hear the Divine word, and for the first time since Yosef's disappearance, G-d speaks to Yaakov, saying:

אַל תִּירָא מִרְדָּה מִצְרַיִמָּה כִּי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשִׁימָךְ שָׁם.

*“Do not fear going down to Egypt,*

*for I will make you into a great nation there.”* (46,3)

## ■ The Pain of the Prophet

Let us return once again to the passage from which the Gemara derived that prophecy must be accompanied by happiness. Elisha had asked that a minstrel be brought before him, *“and when the minstrel played music, the hand of G-d came upon Elisha.”* What was Elisha so sad about, to the point that it prevented him from receiving prophecy?

The answer is that Elisha found himself facing a wicked king of Israel, Yehoram, who came to request the prophet’s help in fending off a Moavite attack against Israel and Judah. Yehoram was not a desirable leader for Israel, having continued the evil and idolatrous path of his father King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. As a Prophet of Israel, Elisha felt deep pain and sadness at not having succeeded in destroying their idols and returning the leaders to the service of Hashem.

The second king standing before Elisha at that time was King Yehoshafat of Judah, a righteous and G-d-fearing man. Elisha thus wanted a minstrel to play music to uplift his spirit, so that he could continue to see the great goal and mitzvah before him: saving the armies of Israel from death and thirst, and bringing about Yehoram’s repentance, with the help of Yehoshafat, via the great Divine miracles that would accompany their battle.

Elisha knew that the joy of music and the goal of fulfilling a mitzvah are what comprise the necessary “joy of mitzvah.”

He turns with anger to King Yehoram and says: *“What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and mother! If it were not for Yehoshafat, I would not even look at you.”* (verses 13-14)

Elisha well knows the sorrow that his teacher and mentor Eliyahu the Prophet experienced just after his great prophetic success. At the famous stand atop Mount Carmel, Eliyahu had succeeded in sanctifying G-d’s Name when fire came down from the Heavens to consume his sacrifice and not those of the idol worshipers. The entire nation fell on its face and declared out loud: ה' הוא האלוקים, *G-d is the Lord!* All the false prophets for Baal were killed at that time, and heavy, long-awaited rains began to fall, following years of drought. With soul uplifted to the highest heights and with great “joy of mitzvah,” Eliyahu girds his loins and begins running, in the pouring rain, before King Ahav. He runs eastward for tens of kilometers, from the Carmel in the Land’s northwest all the way to the Jezreel Valley. This, essentially, is the pinnacle of his prophetic mission: He has succeeded

in bringing the nation to repentance, destroying the cult of Baal, and supplying rain for Israel.

But it does not last. The next thing that happens is that Queen Jezebel threatens to kill him, and Eliyahu begins to sink into deep despair, even asking for death:

... רב עתה. ה' קח נַפְשִׁי כִּי לֹא טוֹב אֲנִי מֵאֲבֹתַי.  
*... It is enough. G-d, take my soul,  
 for I am no better than my fathers.* (Kings I 19,4)

Hashem responds to him:

... וְאֵת אֵלִישָׁע בֶּן שָׁפָט מֵאֵיֶל מְחֹלָה, תִּמְשַׁח לְנָבִיא תַּחֲתָיָה.  
*Anoint Elisha ben Shafat from Avel Mehola as  
 a prophet in your stead.* (verse 16)

“If you feel that you no longer have a purpose and goal,” G-d says, “this is a sign that you have reached the end of your prophetic mission. From now on, the mission that I have assigned you will be filled by your student Elisha. He will take your place.”

All of the above illustrates why the Prophets would often make sure to have musicians with their musical instruments around, ready to play. When the Prophet Shmuel was advising Sha’ul before anointing him as king, Shmuel told him: “*When you arrive in the city, you will meet a group of prophets descending... with a lute, drum, flute and a lyre, and they will be prophesizing.*” (Samuel I 10,5)

The sadness that often seemed to be the prophets’ lot stemmed from their pain at not succeeding in effecting an intrinsic change in the people, and at failing to uproot the plague of idol worship in the Land of Israel. This is why they, of all people, required music to gladden their hearts so that they could continue to transmit prophecy.

### ■ **Extracting the Precious from the Vile**

Strong sadness enveloped the prophet Jeremiah.

In Chapter 15 of his book, we read how Jeremiah stood before G-d to lament his sad lot. He suffers daily insults and worse from his compatriots, who refuse to hear his reproach and predictions of destruction. The pain he feels causes him great sorrow, which prevents him from receiving the Divine mission. Jeremiah’s words:

... לא נשיתי ולא נשו בי בלה מקללוני.

*I have neither lent, nor have they lent to me – yet they all curse me...*

נמצאו דבריך ואכלם, ויהי דברך לי לששון ולשמחת לבבי כי נקרא שמך עלי ה' אלהי צבאות ... למה היה כאבי נצח ומפתי אנושה מאנה הרפא...

*Your words were found and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and gladness of my heart, for Your Name is called upon me... Why is my pain everlasting, and my wound a mortal one, refusing to be cured? (Jeremiah 15,10-18)*

And to this, G-d responded to him:

אם תשוב ואשיבה, לפני תעמד. ואם תוציא יקר מזולל כפי תהיה...

*If you return, I will return you, and you will stand before me. And if you extract the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth... (verse 19)*

Hashem is telling the prophet that if he retracts his sentiments of despair, he will be able to continue before G-d as a prophet and emissary to Israel. “Even if you only save one person,” G-d says, “even if you only take out one ‘preciousness’ from the vile, that will be fine. If you do so, you will be able to represent Me and be My spokesman.”

G-d thus encourages Jeremiah to accept upon himself the Divine mission and assignment. This requires the prophet’s great inner strength and willingness to fulfill a very complex and important mission.

## ■ The Joy of Divine Worship

We have until now dealt with external happiness, such as music, which enables the acceptance of prophecy and the Divine mission. But the other side of the coin is that when one is sent on a mission to accomplish a very exalted goal, that itself is the source of true joy: the joy that stems from accomplishing the mitzvah.

The mission of every single Jew in the world is three-pronged. The most basic layer is predicated on his being a member of the human race, obligating him in the basic Seven Noachide Commandments.

Atop that layer is the unique mission of the Nation of Israel, which accepted upon itself 613 mitzvot. These symbolize higher-level goals in life, and are of course more demanding.

Finally, the highest level is the personal mission of each and every person individually. Everyone is different than everyone else, and this is why every person has been assigned his own unique task in the world; no one else can fill it in his place.

Hashem equips each person with abilities and talents, as well as conditions such as where and to whom he is born, that are precisely matched with the job he was assigned. All that remains for the person to do is to discover what his unique task is!

Every time someone fulfills his national or individual mission, or even part of it, he is filled with an emotion of true joy – a sensation that lasts forever. For instance, the Talmud (B'rachot 9b) describes the spiritual greatness of Rav Bruna:

**Rabbi Ila'a said to Ula: When you get to the Land of Israel, ask for my brother Rav Bruna before the entire group [thus showing him great honor], for he is a great man and derives joy from performing mitzvot.**

We see, therefore, that external song and music help one receive prophecy and one's Divine mission. Once he performs his mission, that itself becomes a source for further joy. This deep concept is expressed in the Talmud (P'sachim 117a) in a different manner:

**Whenever one of the Psalms begins with לדוד מזמור, *To David a song*, this means that the Divine Inspiration rested upon David and then he sang the song. When a Psalm starts with מזמור לדוד, *A song to David*, it means that he first sang, and only afterwards did the Divine Presence rest upon him.**

The message here is as we said. There are three stages: First comes song and joy, then the Divine Presence, and then more song and joy.

### ■ Prayer and Mission

Precisely in the same way that prophecy and mitzvot are G-d's "assigned missions" for Israel, prayer is similarly a mission - but in the other direction. It is a mission given to Hashem by Bnei Yisrael. How so?

The prayers that we recite are written in plural: "Forgive us," "Heal us," "Hear our voice," etc. This teaches us that each and every individual is essentially a *shliach tzibur*, a representative of the entire community. Every one represents the entirety of Israel; we are all *shlichei mitzvah*, "emissaries

sent to perform a mitzvah” on behalf of Israel vis-à-vis Hashem. Therefore, prayer too must also come out of “joy of mitzvah,” on the one hand – and also from a feeling of seriousness and gravity, on the other hand.

A phrase in Psalms (2,11) shows how there is a connection between these two apparent extremes: וגילו ברעדה, *Rejoice with trembling*. That is, every single Jew is an “emissary sent to perform a mitzvah” in bringing Israel’s prayers and supplications to Hashem. At the same time, he represents G-d’s mission to Israel, via the special mitzvot that he is commanded.

There is no greater joy than fulfilling these missions. This is the real “service of G-d in happiness.”

