

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS  
VAYEILECH

# בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ

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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

## LISTEN FOR THE MUSIC

**P**arshas Vayeilech introduces us to a new aspect of our Torah, the aspect of *shirah*.<sup>1</sup> *Shirah* is often translated as song, or perhaps poem. Though the exact translation may elude us, it is clear that a *shirah* is not a simple essay or novel.

‘Song’ or ‘poem’ does not appear to be an appropriate appellation for our Torah. The Torah seems to be a composition comprising of stories and laws. What aspect of the Torah is a song? In fact, how is the Torah so much like a song that one would term the entire Torah in this fashion?

The Netziv<sup>2</sup> (Reb Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, 1816–1893) explains that there are two fundamental similarities between the Torah and a song.

A song will often allude to ideas or events using nuanced or subtle language. This is the very nature of a song, not only is it not abnormal, it would be odd for a song to explicitly spell out every reference. In fact, those who truly understand the subtle references are often charmed or even thrilled by the clever wording.

Additionally, a song lends itself to buried hints and references within the wording. For example, a clever songwriter may use the first letter of every stanza to spell out their name.

Now we can understand how our Torah is like a song. Every sentence is brilliantly written, holding within each word references and nuances that can only be understood by those who already know the idea or event that is being alluded to.

The explanation of the Torah (Oral Law) was given along with the Torah itself. There is no other way to understand our Torah without it. Attempting to do so is akin to attempting to decipher a student’s notes without being at the lecture.<sup>3</sup>

What depth! What sophistication! Let us reflect for a moment on the profundity of every nuance of our Torah! With this appreciation, we can renew our commitment to doing what we can to understand the word of Hashem.

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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Many people may think that the depth of Torah is reserved for those who study *Gemara* on a profound level. However, the truth is that everyone, regardless of station or level of knowledge, can appreciate the beauty of what they are learning, if they have the proper mindset.

The first step is to recognize who the Author is — once we realize that the ‘simple’ *passukim* that we read were written by the Creator of the universe, it will help shift our perception from simply reading a story, or even a story with a lesson, to something much deeper.

When we start to get a glimpse of the personalities of the commentaries — the encyclopedic knowledge, the years they spent mastering the material, and the humility they have before those who came before them, we start to get a taste of the infinite subject before us, and how we are simply scratching the surface.

We may not personally be able to reach the bottom of the infinite Torah, but when we recognize what is truly in front of us, we will put ourselves in a much better mindset to thoroughly appreciate the greatness of Torah.

1 *Devarim* 31:19, 21, 22, 30

2 *Kidmas Ha'emek* 3

3 R' S. R. Hirsch on *Shemos* 21:2 s.v. כי תקנה עבד

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**If you want to be happy, study  
Mesillas Yesharim; if you want to  
be even happier, study Chovos  
HaLevavos as well.** - Rav Avigdor Miller  
zt"l, eponymous biography by R' Yaakov  
Hamburger, pg. 549

# COMPLEX CALCULATIONS

In many ways, Yaakov\* was your typical teenage boy. He liked sports, hanging out with friends, and listening to music. He also enjoyed learning, Torah or otherwise. What set him apart, though, was his keen intellect and piercing questions. His academic success led him to graduate high school early, getting his diploma a few days after turning 16.

However, not everything was wonderful in Yaakov's universe. In fact, things were downright unpleasant. Yaakov wasn't sure where he fit in, and at such a young age, he was questioning whether this was the lifestyle for him. Did he want to stay in *yeshiva*? Perhaps it was time to move on, to find himself in other circumstances.

Yet, he still felt drawn to the *beis medrash*. Every day was a war — some days he went to *shiur*, and other days he found himself elsewhere. The struggle persisted, day after day.

Though he slept in the *yeshiva*, every Friday Yaakov would travel with Azaryah, his closest friend, to where they both lived. Azaryah was only a year older than Yaakov, but decades older in wisdom. Yaakov enjoyed this time with Azaryah where they both discussed all topics, from the mundane to the sacred.

One day, Yaakov stated flatly, "There is no discipline, no science, no study that can compare to Torah." Azaryah was a bit taken aback by this statement, but waited patiently for Yaakov to continue. "Look, I know I'm only 16, but I have to tell you, the more you learn, the more you realize the depth and beauty of Torah. Start with a *Gemara*, then delve into a *Tosfos*. From there you look at a *Maharsha*, and then see a question from R' Akiva Eiger. And when you find the answer... I'm telling you, Azaryah, there's just so much beauty there!"

Azaryah nodded, and advanced a small smile. "There certainly is."

It's been years since that conversation. His appreciation for the depth of Torah kept Yaakov in *yeshiva*, and, in fact, he is still learning today.

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

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but I have to tell you,  
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## DID YOU KNOW?

- How deep is the Torah! R' Yochanan ben Zakkai knew everything, from the secrets of the Divine Chariot to the subtle discussions between Abaya and Rava.<sup>1</sup> Yet, he felt that his knowledge, compared to his Rebbi, *Hillel Hazakein*, was like 'the moisture a fly removes after bathing in the ocean.'<sup>2</sup>
- R' Eliezer, who was always the first one in the *beis medrash*, and the last to leave,<sup>3</sup> said that his knowledge, compared to his Rebbi, R' Yochanan ben Zakkai, is like 'that which a dog laps from the sea.'<sup>4</sup>
- The great Rebbi Akiva, through whom the majority of our current Torah knowledge passed,<sup>5</sup> when compared to his Rebbi, R' Eliezer, only learned 'that amount which can pass through a small hole.'<sup>6</sup>

1 *Sukkah* 28a

2 *Sofrim* 16:6

3 *Sukkah* 28a

4 *Sanhedrin* 68a

5 *Sanhedrin* 86a, *Rashi ibid.* s.v. אליבא דרבי עקיבא

6 *Sanhedrin* 68a