Lyricism, Love, and Loyalty

Dr. Shaina Trapedo

Consider the following reflections on music…

1. From Plato's *Republic*

> Come then, and let us pass a leisure hour in story-telling, and our story shall be the education of our heroes.
>
> By all means.
> And what shall be their education? Can we find a better than the traditional sort? --and this has two divisions, gymnastic for the body, and music for the soul.
>
> True.
> Shall we begin education with music, and go on to gymnastic afterwards?
>
> By all means.
> And when you speak of music, do you include literature or not?
>
> I do.
> And literature may be either true or false?
> Yes.
> And the young should be trained in both kinds, and we begin with the false?
>
> I do not understand your meaning, he said.
> You know, I said, that we begin by telling children stories which, though not wholly destitute of truth, are in the main fictitious; and these stories are told them when they are not of an age to learn gymnastics.
>
> Very true.
> That was my meaning when I said that we must teach music before gymnastics.
>
> Quite right, he said.
> You know also that the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing; for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.

2. From William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*

> The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
> The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
> And his affections dark as Erebus.
> Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.

3. "I play the notes as they are written, but it is God who makes the music." —Johann Sebastian Bach
4. "Music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy."—Ludwig van Beethoven

5. From "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee"), lyrics by Samuel Francis Smith (1831)

    My country, 'tis of thee,
    Sweet land of liberty,
    Of thee I sing;
    Land where my fathers died,
    Land of the pilgrims' pride,
    From ev'ry mountainside
    Let freedom ring! …

    Let music swell the breeze,
    And ring from all the trees
    Sweet freedom's song;
    Let mortal tongues awake;
    Let all that breathe partake;
    Let rocks their silence break,
    The sound prolong.

    Our fathers' God to Thee,
    Author of liberty,
    To Thee we sing.
    Long may our land be bright,
    With freedom's holy light,
    Protect us by Thy might,
    Great God our King!

6. "Music is the universal language of mankind." — Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

7. "Music, when soft voices die, vibrates in the memory." — Percy Bysshe Shelley

8. "God has given us music so that above all it can lead us upwards. Music unites all qualities: it can exalt us, divert us, cheer us up, or break the hardest of hearts with the softest of its melancholy tones. But its principal task is to lead our thoughts to higher things, to elevate, even to make us tremble… The musical art often speaks in sounds more penetrating than the words of poetry, and takes hold of the most hidden crevices of the heart… Song elevates our being and leads us to the good and the true. If, however, music serves only as a diversion or as a kind of vain ostentation it is sinful and harmful." — Friedrich Nietzche (quoted by Julian Young in *Friedrich Nietzche: A Philosophical Biography)*

For Discussion:

Which author's statements surprise or resonate with you most?
Which do you agree/disagree with?

In what ways has music shaped your daily living, beliefs, and/or "character"?

*Bonus: Did the pandemic affect your engagement with music in anyway? If so, how, and why?

Songs in Tanach and Jewish Tradition

Exodus 15:1

Then sang Moshe and the children of Yisra'el this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider has he thrown into the sea.

אָז יָשִׁיר־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר אָשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאֹה גָּאָה
סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם׃

Kitzur Baal HaTurim on Exodus 15:1:3

The spelling is "Yod" then "Shir" - meaning there are 10 songs: Sea, Well, Haazinu, Joshua, Devorah, Hannah, Rod, Shlomoh, Hizkiyahu, and the song to come.

ישיר יו"ד שיר שיו"ד שירות הם. ים. באר. האזינו. יהושע. דבורה. חנה. רוד. שלמה. חזקיה. ושירה לעתיד׃

Song of the Sea	Song at the Well	Haazinu	Song of Joshua
Exodus 15	Numbers 21	Deuteronomy 32	Joshua 10:12 - 13

Song of Deborah	Song of Hannah	Song of David (Rod)
Judges 5	1 Samuel 2	2 Samuel 22

For Discussion:

Consider the *shirim* linked above. Of all the events and encounters recorded in Tanach, why do you think *these* moments in early Israelite history are lyricized and sung?

What does lyricism offer that narrative does not?

How do songs "work" on a national/personal level?

How might we understand these episodes in Tanach in light of Rabbi Sacks' statement that "Faith is not a form of 'knowing' in the sense in which that word is used in science and philosophy. It is, in the Bible, a mode of listening"(*The Great Partnership*, 74)?

Consider the following…

Tehillim 150

1 Haleluya! Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. 2 Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his exceeding greatness. 3 Praise him with the sound of the shofar: praise him with the harp and lyre. 4 Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and the pipe. 5 Praise him upon sounding cymbals: praise him upon loud

הַלְלוּ־יָהּ הַלְלוּ־אֵל בְּקָדְשׁוֹ הַלְלוּהוּ בִּרְקִיעַ עֻזּוֹ׃
הַלְלוּהוּ בִּגְבוּרֹתָיו הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גֻּדְלוֹ׃
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֵקַע שׁוֹפָר הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֵבֶל וְכִנּוֹר׃
הַלְלוּהוּ בְתֹף וּמָחוֹל הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעֻגָב׃
הַלְלוּהוּ בְצִלְצְלֵי־שָׁמַע הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה׃
כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יָהּ הַלְלוּ־יָהּ׃

clashing cymbals. 6 Let everything that has
breath praise the Lord. Haleluya!

Sanhedrin 99b

זמר בכל יום זמר בכל יום אמר רב יצחק בר אבודימי מאי קרא שנאמר (משלי טז, כו) נפש עמל עמלה לו כי אכף עליו פיהו הוא עמל במקום זה ותורתו עומלת לו במקום אחר

Sing every day, sing every day, i.e., review your studies like a song that one sings over and over. Rav Yitzḥ ak bar Avudimi says: From what verse is this derived? It is as it is stated: "The hunger of the laborer labors for him; for his mouth presses upon him" (Proverbs 16:26), i.e., he exhausts his mouth through constant review and study. He labors in Torah in this place, this world, and his Torah labors for him in another place, the World-to-Come.

"Even if a person cannot sing well, he can at least sing when he is alone. One cannot imagine the worth of a tune." — Rebbe Nachman, *Sichot Haran 273*

Think about the role that singing and tefila play in Judaism, from day-to-day practice to the observance of holidays to life cycle events.

Figure 1.1. The three parts of the human vocal apparatus. From Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (1616). Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C.

As Bruce R. Smith explains, there are several ways to think about oral performances: "(1) as a physical act, as something you have done with your body; (2) as a sensory experience, as something you have heard; (3) as an act of communication, as something you have projected into the world around you; (4) as a political performance, as something you have done because of other people, if not in this particular case with other people, for other people, and to other people. Each of these ways of thinking… makes its own demands on your attention, each comes equipped with its own terms of analysis, each bears its own intellectual history, each suffers its own limitations."

For Discussion:

How might each of these ways of thinking about vocalizing Torah and tefila help us understand the relationship between songs, faith, and service of God?

"The Spirituality of Song"
Ha'azinu, 5776
Rabbi Sacks

With Haazinu we climb to one of the peaks of Jewish spirituality. For a month Moses had taught the people. He had told them their history and destiny, and the laws that would make theirs a unique society of people bound in covenant with one another and with God. He renewed the covenant and then handed the leadership on to his successor and disciple Joshua. His final act would be blessing the people, tribe by tribe. But before that, there was one more thing he had to do. He had to sum up his prophetic message in a way the people would always

remember and be inspired by. He knew that the best way of doing so is by music. So the last thing Moses did before giving the people his deathbed blessing was to teach them a song.

There is something profoundly spiritual about music. When language aspires to the transcendent, and the soul longs to break free of the gravitational pull of the earth, it modulates into song. Jewish history is not so much read as sung…

Many biblical texts speak of the power of music to restore the soul. When Saul was depressed, David would play for him and his spirit would be restored (1 Sam. 16). David himself was known as the "sweet singer of Israel" (2 Sam. 23: 1). Elisha called for a harpist to play so that the prophetic spirit could rest upon him (2 Kings 3: 15). The Levites sang in the Temple. Every day, in Judaism, we preface our morning prayers with Pesukei de-Zimra, the 'Verses of Song' with their magnificent crescendo, Psalm 150, in which instruments and the human voice combine to sing God's praises.

Mystics go further and speak of the song of the universe, what Pythagoras called "the music of the spheres." This is what Psalm 19 means when it says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands . . . There is no speech, there are no words, where their voice is not heard. Their music carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world." Beneath the silence, audible only to the inner ear, creation sings to its Creator.

So, when we pray, we do not read: we sing. When we engage with sacred texts, we do not recite: we chant. Every text and every time has, in Judaism, its own specific melody. There are different tunes for shacharit, mincha and maariv, the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, Shabbat, the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot (which have much musically in common but also tunes distinctive to each), and for the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. There are different tunes for different texts. There is one kind of cantillation for Torah, another for the haftorah from the prophetic books, and yet another for Ketuvim, the Writings, especially the five Megillot. There is a particular chant for studying the texts of the written Torah: Mishnah and Gemarah. So by music alone we can tell what kind of day it is and what kind of text is being used. Jewish texts and times are not colour-coded but music-coded. The map of holy words is written in melodies and songs.

Music has extraordinary power to evoke emotion. The Kol Nidrei prayer with which Yom Kippur begins is not really a prayer at all. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. There can be little doubt that it is its ancient, haunting melody that has given it its hold over the Jewish imagination. It is hard to hear those notes and not feel that you are in the presence of God on the Day of Judgment, standing in the company of Jews of all places and times as they pleaded with heaven for forgiveness. It is the holy of holies of the Jewish soul.

Nor can you sit on Tisha B'av reading Eichah, the book of Lamentations, with its own unique cantillation, and not feel the tears of Jews through the ages as they suffered for their faith and wept as they remembered what they had lost, the pain as fresh as it was the day the Temple was destroyed. Words without music are like a body without a soul…

Faith is more like music than science. Science analyzes, music integrates. And as music connects note to note, so faith connects episode to episode, life to life, age to age in a timeless melody that breaks into time. God is the composer and librettist. We are each called on to be voices in the choir, singers of God's song. Faith is the ability to hear the music beneath the noise. So music is a signal of transcendence… I once watched a teacher explaining to young children (they were not yet teens) the difference between a physical possession and a spiritual one. He had them build a paper model of Jerusalem. Then (this was in the days of tape-recorders) he put on a tape with a song about Jerusalem that he taught to the class. At the end of the session he did something very dramatic. He tore up the model and shredded the tape. He asked the children, "Do we still have the model?" They replied, No. "Do we still have the song?" They replied, Yes. We lose physical possessions, but not spiritual ones. We lost the physical Moses. But we still have the song.

Love Songs and Loyalty

"And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."(Isaiah 62:5)

Mishnah Yadayim 3:5

> "Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai said: I have received a tradition from the seventy-two elders on the day when they appointed Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah head of the academy that the Song of Songs and Kohelet defile the hands. Rabbi Akiba said: Far be it! No man in Israel disputed that the Song of Songs [saying] that it does not defile the hands. For the whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies."

At first blush, *Shir HaShirim* seems like a sensual poetic conversation between two lovers, but the rabbinic tradition reads it as a romantic allegory, in which God is wedded to Israel, who has been unfaithful (i.e., idolatrous and transgressive). Distanced and scorned by her husband, the exiled bride yearns to return to her beloved, and both husband *and* wife want to restore the intimacy and fidelity of the relationship of their youth.

Consider these selections from *Shir HaShirim*…

1: 1–12

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לִשְׁלֹמֹה׃

The song of songs, which is Solomon’s.

יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דֹּדֶיךָ מִיָּיִן׃

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth— For thy love is better than wine.

לְרֵיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ טוֹבִים שֶׁמֶן תּוּרַק שְׁמֶךָ עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֲהֵבוּךָ׃

Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance; Thy name is as ointment poured forth; Therefore do the maidens love thee.

מְשְׁכֵנִי אַחֲרֶיךָ נָּרוּצָה הֱבִיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו נָגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בָּךְ נַזְכִּירָה דֹדֶיךָ מִיַּיִן מֵישָׁרִים אֲהֵבוּךָ׃

Draw me, we will run after thee; The king hath brought me into his chambers; We will be glad and rejoice in thee, We will find thy love more fragrant than wine! Sincerely do they love thee.

שְׁחוֹרָה אֲנִי וְנָאוָה בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָםִ כְּאָהֳלֵי קֵדָר כִּירִיעוֹת שְׁלֹמֹה׃

’I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, As the tents of Kedar, As the curtains of Solomon.

אַל־תִּרְאוּנִי שֶׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת שֶׁשְּׁזָפַתְנִי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בְּנֵי אִמִּי נִחֲרוּ־בִי שָׂמֵנִי נֹטֵרָה אֶת־הַכְּרָמִים כַּרְמִי שֶׁלִּי לֹא נָטָרְתִּי׃

Look not upon me, that I am swarthy, That the sun hath tanned me; My mother’s sons were incensed against me, They made me keeper of the vineyards; But mine own vineyard have I not kept.’

הַגִּידָה לִּי שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי אֵיכָה תִרְעֶה אֵיכָה תַּרְבִּיץ בַּצָּהֳרָיִם שֶׁלָּמָּה אֶהְיֶה כְּעֹטִיָּה עַל עֶדְרֵי חֲבֵרֶיךָ׃

Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, Where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; For why should I be as one that veileth herself Beside the flocks of thy companions?

אִם־לֹא תֵדְעִי לָךְ הַיָּפָה בַּנָּשִׁים צְאִי־לָךְ בְּעִקְבֵי הַצֹּאן וּרְעִי אֶת־גְּדִיֹּתַיִךְ עַל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת הָרֹעִים׃

If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock And feed thy kids, beside the shepherds’tents.

לְסֵסָתִי בִּרְכְבֵי פַרְעֹה דִּמִּיתִיךְ רַעְיָתִי׃

I have compared thee, O my love, To a steed in Pharaoh’s chariots.

נָאווּ לְחָיַיִךְ בַּתֹּרִים צַוָּארֵךְ בַּחֲרוּזִים׃

Thy cheeks are comely with circlets, Thy neck with beads.

תּוֹרֵי זָהָב נַעֲשֶׂה־לָּךְ עִם נְקֻדּוֹת הַכָּסֶף׃

We will make thee circlets of gold With studs of silver.

עַד־שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ בִּמְסִבּוֹ נִרְדִּי נָתַן רֵיחוֹ׃

While the king sat at his table, My spikenard sent forth its fragrance.

5: 1 - 7

בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה אָרִיתִי מוֹרִי עִם־בְּשָׂמִי אָכַלְתִּי יַעְרִי עִם־דִּבְשִׁי שָׁתִיתִי יֵינִי עִם־חֲלָבִי אִכְלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ וְשִׁכְרוּ דּוֹדִים׃ {ס}

I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends; Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֵר קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק פִּתְחִי־לִי אֲחֹתִי רַעְיָתִי יוֹנָתִי תַּמָּתִי שֶׁרֹּאשִׁי נִמְלָא־טָל קְוֻצּוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לָיְלָה׃

I sleep, but my heart waketh; Hark! my beloved knocketh: ‘Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; For my head is filled with dew, My locks with the drops of the night.’

פָּשַׁטְתִּי אֶת־כֻּתָּנְתִּי אֵיכָכָה אֶלְבָּשֶׁנָּה רָחַצְתִּי

אֶת־רַגְלַי אֵיכָכָה אֲטַנְּפֵם׃ דּוֹדִי שָׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן־הַחֹר וּמֵעַי הָמוּ עָלָיו׃ קַמְתִּי אֲנִי לְפְתֹחַ לְדוֹדִי וְיָדַי נָטְפוּ־מוֹר וְאֶצְבְּעֹתַי מוֹר עֹבֵר עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמַּנְעוּל׃ פָּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי חָמַק עָבָר נַפְשִׁי יָצְאָה בְדַבְּרוֹ בִּקַּשְׁתִּיהוּ וְלֹא מְצָאתִיהוּ קְרָאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי׃ מְצָאַנִי הַשֹּׁמְרִים הַסֹּבְבִים בָּעִיר הִכּוּנִי פְצָעוּנִי נָשְׂאוּ אֶת־רְדִידִי מֵעָלַי שֹׁמְרֵי הַחֹמוֹת׃	I have put off my coat; How shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; How shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, And my heart was moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; And my hands dropped with myrrh, And my fingers with flowing myrrh, Upon the handles of the bar. I opened to my beloved; But my beloved had turned away, and was gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that go about the city found me, They smote me, they wounded me; The keepers of the walls took away my mantle from me.

For Discussion:

If the husband indeed still loves his wife, despite her indiscretions, why does he withhold his company and allow her to suffer?

What is the relationship between love and loyalty? How do love and loyalty differ?

Do your relationships with friends, parents, siblings, and others shape how you understand a personal relationship with God?

Consider the following...

'Marriage Metaphor' by Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm
(Image by Yoram Raanan)

Very few things in life are certain. At best we can have only a dim and vague perception of things to come. Marriage seems to be one of the most uncertain of ventures. To enter into marriage is an act of faith—and of awareness of all the risks attendant upon this decision. One who gets married without such an awareness, is performing a blind act. One who refuses to marry because he is afraid of the risks, and is waiting for a "sure thing," will likely as not wait forever. Intelligent marriage is an act of faith in a state of high consciousness and alertness and awareness of the unknown, and yet a willingness to commit oneself because of a higher and deeper feeling, because of an intuition that it is worth the plunge into the Red Sea of problems and pleasure, dangers and delights.

This holds true, following the marriage metaphor, for religious life as well. We live in a tempestuous and convulsive age, in which we are beset by all kinds of demands, pulls, pressures and tensions. Pure, absolute, and consistent faith is extremely difficult to come by. At best, our faith waxes and wanes. But if a person is going to wait until he is a hundred percent sure of every aspect of Judaism, until he understands everything and has no doubts left, he will spend his life in limbo and never achieve the greatness of faith. Religious commitment is, after all, fundamentally an act of faith and willingness to embrace all the risks that commitment entails. Perhaps that is why contemporary writers often speak of the "leap of faith." Those who have been thinking of embarking upon the Jewish adventure, must wait until they are spiritually ready—but it must come sooner rather than later, for complete certainty and absolute sureness rarely are achieved in the normal course of life. If anything, they are achieved after the commitment as an act of faith rather than before it!"

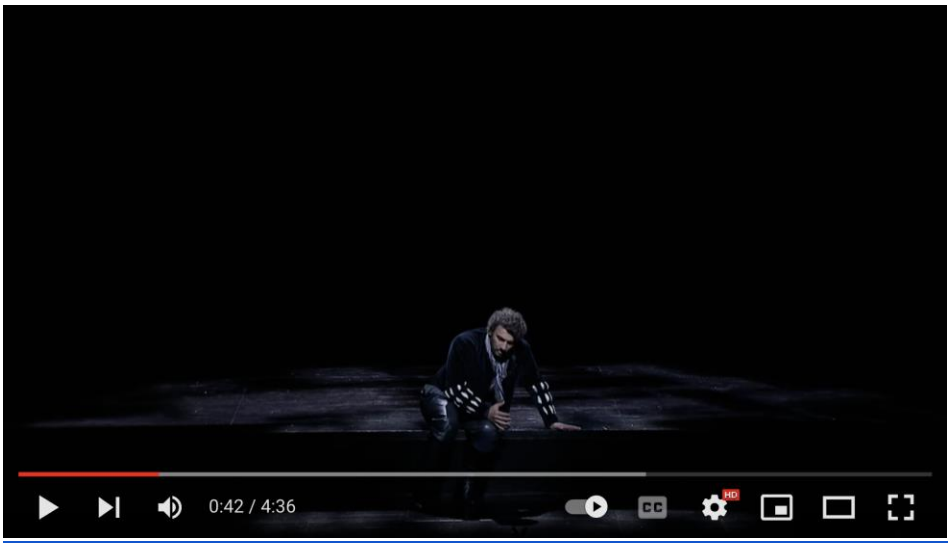
This next section is under development in that I'm not sure it fits/serves the lesson.

"Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love."
Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2

In Shakespeare's *Othello* tells the tragic story of a Moor who falls in love with Desdemona, Venetian noblewoman who marries him against her father's will. Iago, Othello's trusted lieutent, confesses to hating him and deceives Othello into thinking his beloved new bride is unfaithful. In this scene from Verdi's opera adaptation *Otello*, he has just been told about his wife's deception.

For Discussion:

Listen to the aria (without looking at the translation below). How would you describe Othello's response to learning of his wife's (supposed) betrayal? What aspects of the music convey his experience? What is the emotional state of Otello? How can you tell?



Verdi's *Otello,*Scene III, "Dio! Mi potevi scagliar" (Royal Opera House, 2018) with Jonas Kaufmann

Now consider the English translation below.

Libretto	English Libretto or Translation:
OTELLO Dio! mi potevi scagliar tutti i mali della miseria, della vergogna, far de' miei baldi trofei trionfali una maceria, una menzogna… E avrei portàto la croce crudel d'angoscie e d'onte con calma fronte e rassegnato al volere del ciel. Ma, o pianto, o duol! m'han rapito il mirraggio dov'io, giulivo, l'anima acqueto. Spento è quel sol, quel sorriso, quel raggio che mi fa vivo, che mi fa lieto! Tu alfin, Clemenza, pio genio immortal dal roseo riso, copri il tuo viso santo coll'orrida larva infernal!	OTHELLO God! Thou couldst have rained upon my head every affliction of poverty and shame, made of my heroic battle-honours a heap of ruination and a lie ... and I should have borne the cruel cross of torment and disgrace with patience and resigned me to the will of heaven. But – oh tears, oh pain! – to rob me of that vision in which my soul was garnered joyfully! That sun has been snuffed out, that smile, that ray which gives me life and happiness! That sun has been snuffed out, etc. Mercy, thou immortal rose-lipped cherubin, cover at the last thy holy face with the horrid mask of hell!

For Discussion:

Why do you think Verdi's Otello invokes God? What theological ideas are present in his response to Desdemona's perceived unfaithfulness, and why?

How does betrayal differ from other kinds of pain or suffering?

All You Need is Love, Hope, or Faith?

In *Faith in the Future*, Rabbi Sacks writes, "Creation testifies not merely to God's power but also, as it were, to His belief in mankind. At the heart of religion is not just the faith we have in God. No less significant is the faith God has in us" (73).

Consider these poems by Yehoshua November…

"G-d's Optimism"
For Norman Maranz

Because the nature of a stone
is not to fly,
it remains in the air only
as long as the thrower's force
acts upon it.

And in the inner Torah
the same is said of this world,
which comes from nothing
and whose nature, therefore,
is not to exist. It remains
only as long as G-d pushes it into existence.

Think of the optimism of G-d, then,
how, every second, He recreates our lives–
I who have not served Him honestly,
and you who believe you have never served Him.

"After Our Wedding"

When you forgot the address of our hotel
in your suitcase,
the driver had to pull over
in front of the restaurant.

Men and women dining beneath the August sun
looked up from their salads
to clap for you,
a young, slender woman
in a wedding dress and tiara,
retrieving a slip of paper
from the trunk of a cab
in the middle of the street.

And since that day,
many of the guests at our wedding have divorced
or are gone,
and the restaurant has closed
to become a tattoo parlor.
And we have misplaced and found
many more papers,
but no one was clapping.

And the motion of the lives around us
has been like a great bus
slowly turning onto a crowded street.
And some of the passengers
have fallen asleep in their seats,

while others anxiously search
their jacket pockets
for the notes that might wed
their ordinary lives
to something lofty and astonishing.

From God's Optimism (Main Street Rag, 2010)

For Discussion:

Poetry, from the Greek poiesis, means "to create" or bring something into existence that didn't exist before. What new awareness, ideas, or questions have these poems created for you?

What role does "certainty" play in your relationships?

Faith positions and beliefs statements are often expressed in prose articles, manifestos, declarations, and doctrines. In what ways might poetry/song be better suited for exploring and expressing our relationships with God (and others)?

Covenant & Conversation
Seeing and Hearing - Re'eh • 5768
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

To appreciate the originality of Judaism – I have argued more than once in these studies – we must grasp one fundamental point. Unlike almost every other culture in ancient and modern times, Judaism is a religion of sound, not sight; of hearing rather than seeing; of the word as against the image…Hear [shema] O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one… Listen O heavens and I will speak; earth, hear [ve-tishma] the words of my mouth. In one form or another, the verb shema appears no less than 92 times in the course of the book…

No concept has proved more difficult to explain in modern times than the doctrine of Torah min hashamayim, "Torah from heaven." The reason is that it has not been understood in the depth it demands. It is not simply about (though it includes) the Divine authorship of the

Pentateuch, nor is it merely (though it is also) a statement about its authority. First and foremost it is an answer to the ultimate human question: Where do we find God?

Judaism's answer is that God is found, first and foremost, not in the blinding light of the sun, nor in the majesty of mountains. He is not in the almost infinitely vast spaces of the universe… Indeed the mistake you are making consists in the very fact that you are looking at all. God is to be found not by looking but by listening. He lives in words – the words He spoke to the patriarchs and matriarchs, prophets and priests; ultimately in the words of the Torah itself – the words though which we are to interpret all other words… Why is God revealed in words? Because words are what makes us persons… Because of language – and only because of language – we are free and therefore morally responsible agents… We can form moral bonds by sharing promises. The bridge across the abyss between self and other is constructed out of language. Our loneliness is redeemed by words.

God reveals Himself in speech. That is the revolutionary doctrine known as Torah min hashamayim, "Torah from heaven." God is to be found in holiness, and the source, the template, the matrix of holiness is speech. All religions have holy places, holy objects, holy times, holy people. But in Judaism these are derivative not primary. Things are holy only because God has said so. Judaism is the religion of holy words…. If you seek God, turn your attention to language – not to people, places or objects. The hidden presence of God is everywhere. But the revealed presence of God is in the words He gave to humanity on the basis of which He made a series of covenants, first with Noah, then with Abraham, then with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The Mosaic books constitute the covenant binding heaven and earth, God and mankind. Hence the philosophy of Israel – so different from that of ancient Greece, the European Enlightenment and contemporary science: To meet God is to listen to God.

And lastly, for your profit and delight…

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xClZGyj3Cx0