

Talmud Megillah 10b and Sanhedrin 39b each cite the following unit, either in the name of Rabbi Yochanan or Rabbi Yonatan:

“And they did not draw near one to the other all that night” –  
Said Rabbi Y: The Ministering Angels sought to say the Song.  
Said the Holy Blessed One: The works of My hands are drowning in the sea, and you are saying the Song?!

In each context this unit is cited as the capstone to a proof that G-d does not celebrate the deaths of the wicked. This proof is cited in Megillah to challenge Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's (ms. Ben Chanina's) use of Devarim 28:63 (the quote in the Vilna Shas is loose) to introduce his lecture about Purim, and in Sanhedrin to challenge either the Mishnah's citation of Mishlei 11:10 “When the wicked are destroyed there is rejoicing” to prove that one should not hesitate to testify for the prosecution in capital trials, or else R. Chama bar Chanina's application of the same verse to the death of King Ach'av. The unit is not directly relevant – rather, the Talmudic narrator first proves directly that G-d is not gladdened by the death of the wicked, and then cites our unit as further evidence of that proposition. R. Yose bar Chanina then resolves the challenge by asserting that while G-d does not celebrate the destruction of the wicked, He nonetheless facilitates human beings doing so.

For the unit to be relevant to the issue of Divine reaction to the downfall of the wicked, it must refer to the drowning of the Egyptians, and Kahane's assertion seems unfounded.

However, Tanchuma Beshalach 13, Shmot Rabbah 23:7, Eliyahu Rabbah, and Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer 41 all state that G-d refused the angels' praise because the Jews were still in trouble, not because the Egyptians were drowning, with G-d saying not that “the works of My hand are drowning in the sea”, but rather “My children” or “My legions” are at risk in the sea.

The question then is whether one of these versions is demonstrably the original. I think the answer is yes. The demonstration is as follows.

Both versions are formulated as interpretations of Shmot 14:20, “and it did not draw near, one to the other, all that night”. They note that the phrase “one to the other” only appears elsewhere in Tanakh once, namely Yeshayahu 6:3, in the context of the angelic Holiness Song, and therefore apply the phrase in Shmot to the same context. Unmentioned grounds for the interpretation may also include the apparent incongruity of the mutual formulation “one to the other” in Exodus – why would the Jews have drawn nearer to the Egyptians from whom they were fleeing? – as well as the general difficulty finding appropriate antecedents for the “one” and “other” in the verse.

The verse clearly refers to the night *before* the Egyptians drowned. Accordingly, only the version in Tanchuma makes sense, as that night the Egyptians were still alive, and the only reason to present the Song was the still ongoing peril of Israel. It seems to me extremely forced to argue that G-d prevented the Song because He anticipated that the Egyptians would be drowned the next morning.

What, then, are we to make of the version in the Talmud? We cannot dismiss it as a manuscript error because, as we showed above, only a version focused on the Egyptians' death can fit into the logical flow of the Talmud. In other words, if this version is a conscious liberal invention, we can only conclude that the compilers of these sugyot – the stammas d'gemara - were liberals. In that case the weakness of the midrashic argument, which means that the motivation for the unit must be ideological rather than exegetical, strengthens the authority of its substance. I would be very comfortable religiously if my universalism places me with the Talmud against Meir Kahane, and I want to suggest, on the basis of Sanhedrin 98b, that the application of the phrase "works of My hands" to Gentiles is evidence that this is in fact the case.

Shabbat Shalom!

### מגילה י:

רבי יהושע בן לוי פתח לה פיתחא להאי פרשתא מהכא: (דברים כ"ח)  
"והיה כאשר שש' עליכם להיטיב אתכם כן ישיש להרע אתכם".  
ומי חדי הקדוש ברוך הוא במפלתן של רשעים? והא כתיב (דברי הימים ב' כ) "בצאת לפני החלוץ ואמרים:  
הודו לה' כי לעולם חסדו",  
ואמר רבי יוחנן: "מפני מה לא נאמר 'כי טוב' בהודאה זו? לפי שאין הקדוש ברוך הוא שמח במפלתן  
של רשעים,  
ואמר רבי יוחנן: "מאי דכתיב (שמות י"ד) "ולא קרב זה אל זה כל הלילה?"  
בקשו מלאכי השרת לומר שירה.  
אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: 'מעשה ידי טובעין בי, ואתם אומרים שירה!'  
אמר רבי אלעזר: הוא אינו שש, אבל אחרים משיש.  
ודיקא נמי: דכתיב "כן ישיש", ולא כתיב "ישוש" - שמע מינה.

### מדרש תנחומא (בובר) פרשת בשלח סימן יג

ד"א: "אז ישיר" -  
בשעה שהיו ישראל חונים על הים, באו מלאכי השרת לקלס להקב"ה, ולא הניחן הקב"ה,  
שנאמר "ולא קרב זה אל זה וגו'",  
ואומר "וקרא זה אל זה" (ישעי' ו ג).  
למי היו דומין?  
למלך שנשבה בנו. לבש נקמה באויביו והלך להביא אותו, ובאו הבריות לומר לו אימנון.  
אמר להן: לכשאני פודה את בני אתם מקלסין אותי!  
כך -  
ישראל היו נתונים בצרה בי. באו מלאכי השרת לקלס להקב"ה, נזף בהם.  
אמר להם הקב"ה: בני נתונים בצרה, ואתם מקלסין לפני?! . . .

### סנהדרין צח:

ומאי "ונהפכו כל פנים לירקון"  
אמר רבי יוחנן: פמליא של מעלה ופמליא של מטה. בשעה שאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: 'הללו מעשה ידי והללו  
מעשה ידי - היאך אאבד אלו מפני אלו?

## Megillah 10b

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi opened his Purim address by citing the following verse:

“It will be that as Hashem rejoiced (*sas*) regarding you, to cause good to you, so *yasis* to cause evil to you”.

But does the Holy Blessed One really celebrate the downfall of the wicked? But Scripture says “they should go out before the vanguard saying ‘Give acknowledgement to Hashem, for his lovingkindness is forever”,

and Rabbi Yochanan said:

Why does this acknowledgement not contain the phrase “because He is good”?

Because the Holy Blessed One is not gladdened by the downfall of the wicked,

and Rabbi Yochanan said:

“What is meant by the verse “and they did not draw near one to the other all that night”?

At that time the Ministering Angels sought to say the Song before the Holy Blessed One.

The Holy Blessed One said to them: “The products of My hands are drowning in the sea, and you are saying the Song before Me”!?

Said R. El’azar: “He does not rejoice, but he causes others to rejoice.”

Derive this from a close reading as well, as Scripture writes “will cause rejoicing” rather than “will rejoice” – derive from this.

## Tanchuma (Buber) Beshalach 13

Another explanation:

“Then did sing (Mosheh and Bnei Yisroel)” –

At the time that the Jews were camped by the sea, the Ministering Angels came to praise the Holy Blessed One, but He did not give them leave,

as Scripture says: “they did not near (*karav*) one to the other etc.”,

and it says “and they called (*kara*) one to the other”.

To whom were they comparable?

To a king whose son was captured. He dressed for revenge against his enemies and set out to rescue his son, and the populace came to recite his glory.

He said to them: “When I redeem my son you may praise me!”

So –

The Jews were in peril by the sea. The angels of the Court came to praise the Holy Blessed One, but He angrily rebuked them

He said to them: “My children are in danger, and you are praising Me?!”

## Sanhedrin 98b

What is the meaning of “and all faces will turn green”? (Yirmiyahu 30:6)

Said Rabbi Yochanan: [This refers to the faces of] the familia above and the familia below, at the time that the Holy Blessed One said: “These are the works of my hands, and these are the works of my hands – how can I destroy these for the sake of those?”