

“In Praise of Praise”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Perek Shirah is a small rabbinic hymn, almost a prose poem. In it the Rabbis imagine all of creation singing. Everything, from the planets to the fish in the sea, express their love in song.

The modern Hebrew writer Micah Joseph Berdyczewski picks up the theme: “It is not you alone, or we, or those others who pray; all things pray, all things pour forth their souls. The heavens pray, the earth prays, every creature and every living thing prays. In all life there is longing. Creation itself is but a longing, a kind of prayer to the Almighty.”

Prayer is an overflow of the yearning soul, and also a lifeline. The great poet Rilke reminds us that praise is a way to face the world, understand it and, at times, endure it:

*Tell us, O poet, what do you do? I praise.
But those dark, deadly devastating ways,
How do you bear them, suffer them? I praise.
And the Nameless, beyond guess or gaze,
How can you call it, conjure it? I praise.
And whence your right, in every kind of maze
In every mask, to remain true? I praise
And that the mildest and the wildest ways
Know you like star and storm? Because I praise.*