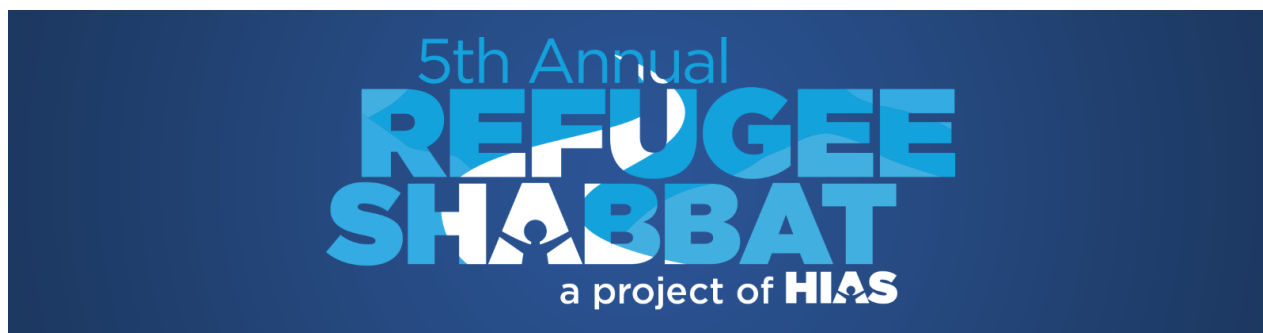


# Singing Ourselves Free

## A Text Study for Refugee Shabbat 2023



Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.



## Refugee Shabbat 2023 Text Study

This Refugee Shabbat coincides with *Shabbat Shirah*, the Sabbath of Song, when the Torah tells the story of the Israelites crossing the Sea of Reeds and then singing out their joy at being free from slavery in Egypt. This study offers different perspectives on the Song of the Sea, and discussion questions to explore how these texts resonate with our own lives and with refugee experiences.

### Part 1: Who is Singing and What is the Song?

#### Source A:

#### שמות ט"ו:א'

אָז זָשִׁיר־מִשֶּׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאִמָּר  
גָּאָה סוּס וָרֶכֶב וְרָמָה בַיָּם:

#### Exodus 15:1

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to יהוה. They said:

I will sing to יהוה, for He has triumphed gloriously;

Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.

#### Source B:

#### שמות ט"ו:כ'

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶת־תּוֹת אֶהָרֶן אֶת־הַתָּף בְּיָדָהּ וַתִּצְאֵן כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים לְאַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתַפִּים וּבַמְּחֹלָתַי: וַתַּעַן לָהֶם  
מִרְיָם שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָאָה סוּס וָרֶכֶב וְרָמָה בַיָּם:

#### Exodus 15:20-21

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, picked up a hand-drum, and all the women went out after her in dance with hand-drums. And Miriam chanted for them:

Sing to יהוה, for He has triumphed gloriously;

Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.

Part 1 Discussion Questions:

- 1) What differences do you notice between Miriam's actions and Moses'? Between their words?
- 2) Imagine you had just crossed the Red Sea, after fleeing your home and with an army chasing you. What kind of song would you have sung to God?
- 3) With little time to prepare or pack, Miriam and her followers still brought their hand-drums with them out of Egypt. What was important for them about the drums? What would you bring with you if you had to flee on such short notice?

## Part 2: Singing Ourselves Free

### Source A:

#### דרשוני כרך א, ספר שמות, שירו לה' אי-ה'

#### שירו לה'

תמר דבדבני 'אָז יִשְׁרֵר־מֶשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָּאָה' (שמות טו, א) וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אַחֹת אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַתֶּף בְּיָדָהּ וַתִּצְאֶן כָּל־הַנְּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתַפִּים וּבְמַחְלֹת. וַתַּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָּאָה סוּס וְרִכְבּוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם' (שמות טו, כ-כא) על שום מה נאמר 'ותען להם מרים?' שהרי כבר בקעה השירה מפי משה, שנאמר 'אשירה לה' כי גאה גאה?' אלא שמרים ידעה שירה שמשה לא ידע.

מהו שירו של משה? משה קרא 'אשירה לה', שהיא שירת היחיד הבודד, שאינה מצטרפת לכלל מקהלת קולות וניגונים. ביקש משה להוציא את הקול מתוך לבו של כל אחד ואחד ולגאול את שירו. אבל שירת הגאולה לא הייתה עדיין שלמה.

ומהי שירתה של מרים? 'שירו לה', לשון רבים היא.

למדה מרים: 'את הדברים האלה דבר ה' אל כל קהלכם בהר מתוך האש הענן והערפל, קול גדול ולא יסף' (דברים ה, יח). 'קול גדול' על שום מה? על שום שהוא מכיל בתוכו רבי-רבבות קולות, מבטאים, לשונות וצלילים. שהקול קול אלוהים והצלם צלם אלוהים – מורכב מכל בני האנוש, על פרצופיהם ודעותיהם השונים. על כן קראה 'שירו לה' כי גאה גאה' – שהיא מאספת ומצרפת כל הקולות כולם, ומחברת את 'אֲשִׁירָה' האישי לשירה משותפת ורבת פנים.

אמרה להם מרים: 'שירו לה' והזכירו לעצמכם את צלם אלוהים אשר בכם, מורכב משבעים פנים ומשבעים לשון ומשבעים ניגונים. 'שירו לה' ברכו שמו' (תהלים צו, ב): בשעה שאתם שרים לו, אתם מברכים את שמו. **על פרצופיהם ודעותיהם – על פי בבלי, ברכות נח, ע"א.**

## Dirshuni I, Exodus, VI 1-5

### **Sing to God**

*Tamar Duvdevani, translation by Rabbi Megan Doherty*

"Thus Moses and the Israelites sang this song to God. Moses said to them 'I will sing to God...' (Ex. 15:1)

"Miriam the Prophet, the sister of Aaron, took her drum in her hand and all the women followed her with drumming and with dancing. Miriam chanted for them, "sing, all of you, to God..."

Why did Miriam need to chant? Hadn't the song already come from the lips of Moses, who said, "I will sing to God...?" But Miriam knew a song that Moses did not.

What was the song of Moses? Moses called out, "I will sing to God," which is the song of one person alone, a song that does not take part in the collective of voices and melodies in a choir. Moses wanted to take the voice from the heart of each person and set their song free.

And what was the song of Miriam? "Sing to God, all of you," is in the language of the many.

Miriam learned: 'God spoke these words to your whole community on the mountain, out of the fiery cloud with a *kol gadol* (mighty/great voice)...' (Deut. 5:19)

Why a 'great voice'? So that it would include within it thousands upon thousands of voices, accents, tongues and sounds. That the voice would be the voice of God and the image the image of God - made up of every human being, with their different faces and different opinions. Therefore, Miriam called out "Sing to God, all of you..." - to gather and include all the voices, and to join the individual "I will sing" to a shared song of the many. Miriam said to them, "Sing to God, all of you" and remind yourselves of the image of God that is within you, made up of seventy faces and seventy languages and seventy melodies. "Sing to God, Bless God's name" (Psalms 96:2): in the moment when you sing to God, you bless God's name.

### **Source B:**

"Within the refugee community it is very interesting to see how, despite the adversity of being away from their place of origin, important support networks are woven, powerful stories of resilience are developed, and people put in place all their available resources to provide better living conditions for themselves and their families, as well as working to fulfill their dreams."

– Hedy Rodriguez Medina, mental health counselor, HIAS Guyana

### Part 2 Discussion Questions:

- 1) Looking at Source A, do you feel more connected to Moses' song of the individual or Miriam's song of the collective? Why do you think you are drawn to the one you are?
- 2) How do you understand this line from Source A: "the image of God – made up of every human being"?
- 3) How have you experienced the power of support networks in your own life? What do you see as the connection between networks, resilience, and fulfilling individual dreams?
- 4) Think about a refugee story you know well. Can you find places in it that reflect the strength and vision of an individual? Can you find places where networks of support created space for thriving and resilience?