

Introduction

In this poem, Aaron ben Joseph focuses on the opening section of our *parasha*, Deuteronomy 7:12–8:5. As in many of his poems, the which offer general praise for God, and for Moses, whose sweet words, taught the people God's will; he then continues by presenting the various elements of the above-mentioned section of the *parasha*: if the people keep God's commandments, then, as a consequence (*'eqev* – the key word of the opening of the *parasha*, which gives the *parasha* its name), God will shower them with blessings. This pleasing message keeps the poem cheery; for the poet does not need to deal with the opposite situation, the punishment if the people do not follow the commandments, for this does not come up in the *parasha* until somewhat later on (Deuteronomy 8:19–20). After the list of blessings, the poet mentions the command to destroy idols (Deuteronomy 7:25), and the reminder that God fed the people manna for forty years in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2–3). He concludes that God, who fed us the manna, is deserving of our praise; this leads into the *qedusha*-verse that follows the poem: *And Thou art Holy, enthroned on Israel's praises.* (Psalms 22:4)

פיוט לפרשת עקב

אַל נַעֲרַץ בְּסוּד מְלֹאכֵי שְׁבִיבו
הַשֵּׁם בְּקִרְבּוֹ אֶת רוּחַ קִדְשׁוֹ כִּי אֶהְיֶה
רוֹעֵה נְאֻמָּן וּתְרוּעַת מְלֹךְ בּו
נִפְתַּת תַּטְפְּנָה שְׁפֹתוֹתָיו וְצוּף דְּבֶשׁ נִיבו
הַמּוֹרָה לְעַם אֵל מַעְגַּל יוֹשֵׁר לְהִיטִיבו
צוֹ לְצוֹ עַל בְּמַתִּי שִׁכְלֵךְ לְהַרְפִּיבו
עֵקֶב יִשְׁמַע מִשְׁפָּטֵי אֵל עִם קְרוּבו
יִשְׁמַר לוֹ יְהוָה בְּרִית וְחֶסֶד נְהַרִי טוּבו
רַנִּי פִלֵּט יְסוּבְכֵנוּ יְסִיר עֲצָבו
בְּרִכּוֹת עֲצוּמוֹת רִשֵׁם בְּמִכְתָּבו
יְבָרֶךְ פְּרִי בִטְנוֹ יִרְכַּב עַל בְּמַתִּי אוֹיְבו
יְסִיר מִמֵּנוּ כָּל חוֹלֵי עֲדֵי יִתְּנֵם לְאוֹרְבו
יִמְשׁוּל עַמִּים בְּקִשְׁתּוֹ וּבַחֲרָבו
יוּכַל לְהוֹרִישֵׁם יִמְלֵא מִשְׁאֵל לְכָבו
כִּי יְהוָה יִהְיֶה מְגִנּוֹ וּמְשַׁגְּבו
פְּסִי־לִי אֱלִיל יִשְׁרוּף לֹא יִחְמוֹד כְּסָפוֹ וְזִקְבו
מִהֲלֵל אֵל יִהְיֶה בְּפִיו בְּקוּמוֹ וּבְמִשְׁפָּבו
אֲשֶׁר הִאֲכִילוֹ מִן וְעִנְהוּ וְהִרְעִיבו
כִּתְּ אֲזָרוֹ הוֹד עֲטָרוֹ כִּי אֲשֶׁרוּ כְּשֶׁרְפִי לְהָבו
לְכֹן יַעֲרִיץ וַיִּקְדֵּשׁ בְּכָל מַחְשָׁבו
קֹהֵל: **בְּשִׁיר נִמְרָץ לְאֵל נַעֲרַץ וְנוֹרָא עַל כָּל סְבִיבו:**

חזן: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת | מִי־כְמוֹד חֶסֶד יְהוָה | וַיִּמְוַנְתֵּךְ סְבִיבוֹתֶיךָ: (תהלים פט:ט)
אִין־קִדְשׁ כִּי־יְהוָה כִּי־אִין בְּלִתֵּךְ | וַאֲיִן צוּר כְּאֱלֹהֵינוּ: (שמואל א ב:ב)
קֹהֵל: **וְאַתָּה קִדְשׁ | יוֹשֵׁב תְּהִלּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל:** (תהלים כב:ד)

Piyyuṭ for Parashath ‘Egev

O God, adulated in the council¹ of his angels of flame,²
Who placed His holy spirit inside³ him,⁴ for He loved him.⁵
[He was] a faithful shepherd,⁶ and the King’s will was with him.⁷
His lips dripped with honey,⁸ and flowing nectar⁹ was his speech.
He taught God’s people the upright path of walking around,¹⁰ to bring goodness to them,
Commandment by commandment,¹¹ to let them ride upon the high places of
understanding.¹²
In consequence of [the fact that] God’s close people¹³ will listen to His laws,

¹ **O God, adulated in the council.** Language from Psalms 89:8: *God, adulated in the great council of the holy, and awesome over all His surroundings.*

² **His angels of flame.** Cf. Psalms 104:4: *He makes winds his angels; His servants are a glowing fire.*

³ FOOTNOTE: **Inside him.** In Moses.

⁴ ENDNOTE: **Inside him.** Moses. A variant text, indicated in handwriting in the margin of the copy of the Venice printing that is scanned on the website of the National Library of Israel, has the words *be-qerev beḥiro*, “inside His chosen one”, instead of “inside him”; this variant reading is a more explicit reference to Moses, who is called “His chosen one” in Psalms 106:23.

⁵ **For He loved him.** For God’s love of Moses, cf. Exodus 33:12: *I know thee by name, and thou hast found favor in My eyes.*

⁶ **Faithful shepherd.** This epithet for Moses goes back at least to the Rabbinic midrashic text *Mekhilta of R. Ishmael*, Vayhi Beshallah §7, and appears a number of places in later midrashic literature, both in Hebrew, as *ro‘é ne’eman*, and in Aramaic, as *ra‘ya mehemna*. The epithet seems to be based on Psalms 37:3, *act as a shepherd in faith*, though that verse is speaking in general, whereas our epithet is used exclusively for Moses, throughout Hebrew literature. The connection to Moses seems to be that he is called *faithful in all My house* in Numbers 12:7, and he started out his career as a shepherd of Jethro’s flock, in Exodus 3:1, before become the leader – shepherd – of the Israelites.

⁷ **The King’s will (teru‘a) was with him.** From Balaam’s oracle in Numbers 23:21; our translation follows Aaron ben Joseph’s explanation in *Sefer Ha-mivḥar* ad loc, that *teru‘a* here means “will” or “desire”, like Aramaic *re‘utha*, and that the King in question is God. On the other hand, *Tuv Ṭa‘am* understands the “king” in this line of the poem as referring to Moses, and, apparently, *teru‘a* as meaning “shepherding”, from *ro‘é*, “shepherd”; yet this does not fit with the poet’s own understanding of the verse in *Sefer Ha-mivḥar*.

⁸ **Dripped with honey.** Cf. Song of Songs 4:11: *Thy lips drip with honey, O bride.*

⁹ **Honey [...] nectar.** The poet uses different words for honey. This is possible in Hebrew, with its multiple words for honey; but in English we have needed to substitute one with “nectar”.

¹⁰ **Upright path of walking around.** Literally, “the walking around [or: circle] of uprightness”.

¹¹ **Commandment by commandment.** Isaiah 28:10.

¹² **Ride upon the high places of understanding.** Cf. Deuteronomy 32:13: *He has them ride upon the high places of the earth*; our poet adapts this verse to reflect his general idea that the purpose of the Torah and its commandments is to bring the Jews to a state of high intellectual understanding.

Adonai will keep for them the covenant and kindness¹⁴ – the rivers of His goodness. He will surround them with joyous songs of deliverance,¹⁵ and remove their sadness. He has recorded mighty blessings in His written document:¹⁶ He will bless the fruit of their womb,¹⁷ and they will ride over their enemy's back;¹⁸ He will remove all sickness from them, such that He gives it to the ones ambushing them.¹⁹ [Israel] will rule over peoples, with their bow and their sword;²⁰ They will be able to dispossess them,²¹ and fulfill their hearts' desire, For Adonai will be their shield and their stronghold.²² They should burn the statues of idols, and not desire their silver or gold.²³ Praise of God²⁴ should be in their mouth, when they arise and when they lie down,²⁵ Who fed them manna, [after] putting them through affliction and starvation.²⁶

¹³ **God's close people.** Language taken from Psalms 148:14: *To the Israelites, His close people.*

¹⁴ **In consequence of [the fact that] God's close people will listen to His laws, Adonai will keep for them the covenant and kindness.** Based on Deuteronomy 7:12, the opening verse of our *parasha*: *And it will be, in consequence of [the fact that] ye listen to these laws, and ye keep and do them, that Adonai will keep for thee the covenant and kindness that He swore to thy ancestors.*

¹⁵ **He will surround them with joyous songs of deliverance.** Language from Psalms 32:7: *Thou art my shelter, and protectest me from the foe; thou surroundest me with joyous songs of deliverance, Selah!*

¹⁶ **He has recorded mighty blessings in His written document.** The blessings listed in the beginning of our *parasha*, Deuteronomy 7:12–16.

¹⁷ **He will bless the fruit of their womb.** Deuteronomy 12:13: *And He will bless the fruit of thy womb.*

¹⁸ **And they will ride over their enemy's back.** Deuteronomy 12:16: *And thou will consume all the peoples that Adonai thy God gives to thee; however, the language is taken from Deuteronomy 33:29: Thy enemies will be subdued before thee, and thou will trample over their backs.*

¹⁹ **He will remove all sickness from them, such that He gives it to the ones ambushing them.** Deuteronomy 7:15: *Adonai will remove all sickness from thee [...] and he will place them on all thy enemies.*

²⁰ **With their bow and their sword.** Cf. Genesis 48:22: *And I give thee an extra portion over thy brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emorites, with my sword and my bow.* These two nouns appear in parallelism also in many other places in Scripture.

²¹ **They will be able to dispossess them.** Deuteronomy 7:17–18: *Lest thou say in thy heart: These nations are too great for me; how shall I be able to dispossess them? Do not be afraid of them [...]*

²² **For Adonai will be their shield and their stronghold.** Cf. II Samuel 22:3: *[God is] my shield, the horn of my rescue, my stronghold, and my refuge [...]*

²³ **They should burn the statues of idols, and not desire their silver or gold.** Deuteronomy 7:25: *The statues of their gods shall ye burn in fire; do not covet the silver or gold that is on them, and take it for thee, lest ye be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to Adonai thy God.*

²⁴ **Praise of God.** Hebrew *mahalal el*, perhaps a pun on the name of the antediluvian patriarch Mahalal'el (Genesis 5:12 ff.).

²⁵ **When they arise and when they lie down.** Cf. the words towards the end of our *parasha*, in the second paragraph of the Shema': *When thou walkest on the road, and when thou liest down, and when thou arisest* (Deuteronomy 11:19).

He has girded them with strength, and crowned them with splendor, for He has given them happiness like his flaming seraphim;²⁷
Therefore, [Israel] should declare [God's] adulation and [His] sanctity,²⁸ full-mindedly,
Cong. With forceful song / to the adulated God,²⁹ who is awesome over all His surroundings.³⁰

Adonai, God of Hosts, who is like Thee, mighty one, Yah? And Thy faithfulness is upon Thy surroundings. (Psalms 89:9)
There is none holy like Adonai, for there is none but Thee; and there is no rock like our God. (I Samuel 2:2)

Cong. **And Thou art Holy, enthroned on Israel's praises.** (Psalms 22:4)

²⁶ **Who fed them manna, [after] putting them through affliction and starvation.**

Deuteronomy 8:3, in our *parasha*: *He put thee through affliction and starvation, and fed thee the manna, which thou didst not know, nor had thy ancestors known [...]*

²⁷ **His flaming seraphim.** Literally, "the seraphim of His flame". For the idea that angels are made of fire, see note 2 above.

²⁸ **Declare [God's] adulation and [His] sanctity.** Cf. Isaiah 29:23: *And they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and adulate the God of Israel.*

²⁹ **With forceful song / to the adulated God.** This creates an internal rhyme in Hebrew: *be-shir nimraz / le'el na'araz.*

³⁰ **To the adulated God, who is awesome over all His surroundings.** Language from Psalms 89:8: *God, adulated in the great council of the holy, and awesome over all His surroundings*, the verse from which the opening words of this poem are taken. Thus, the poem comes full circle at the end. The first verse that follows the poem is Psalms 89:9, the verse that follows this one in Psalms.