Shiur 37

June 13, 2025

**Operation (War) Am K’Lavi**

**By Rav Aviad Tabory**

On the night of June 13, 2025, at 3:00 AM, the citizens of the State of Israel were awakened by a loud siren marking the beginning of a historic operation, Operation Am K’Lavi (“A People like a Lion”). At that hour, the State of Israel attacked Iran with the goal of destroying its nuclear capabilities and acting against its ballistic missile infrastructure. The operation began with a massive surprise attack on Iran, including targeted killings of senior Iranian military officials, leaders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and nuclear scientists.

The strikes targeted major nuclear sites and bases, including Natanz, Parchin, and Fordow. Simultaneously, ballistic missile warehouses and development and launch facilities were also attacked. In response, Iran launched a counterattack that included firing hundreds of ballistic missiles at both military and civilian targets in Israel.

In the early hours of the operation, Israeli intelligence and air force managed to destroy Iran’s central military command structure, including top Iranian generals Hossein Salami, Mohammad Bagheri, and Ali Shadmani.

Since the beginning of the war in October 2023, Israel had been operating on multiple fronts: in Gaza, Judea and Samaria, Lebanon, and Yemen. The achievements of the IDF and security forces were reflected in remarkable intelligence capabilities that led to the elimination of senior terrorist leaders, including Mohammad Deif, Muhammad Sinwar, Ismail Haniyeh (Hamas), and Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah).

The ability to launch such a bold operation was made possible in part by the dramatic changes that had occurred in the Middle East since October 2024. The devastating blows to Hezbollah and the subsequent collapse of the Syrian regime enabled the IDF to operate more freely against Iran. Military capabilities that were considered impossible just months before suddenly became achievable.

The reaction of many Israelis upon hearing of the successful assassinations of Israel’s greatest enemies was an outburst of great joy — expressed through song, dance, reciting Psalms of gratitude, and even blessings of praise and thanks.

The question that arises is: Is it permitted to rejoice at the downfall of Israel’s enemies?

**Contradictory Verses**

Many cite in this context the verse from Proverbs: “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls” (Mishlei 24:17), which seems to instruct us not to rejoice at the downfall of our enemies. Yet another verse in Mishlei states the opposite: “When the wicked perish, there is jubilation” (Mishlei 11:10). How can we reconcile this contradiction?

There are several possible explanations. One can distinguish between “enemies” and “wicked,” between “rejoicing” and “jubilation,” or between “falling” and “perishing.”

The Gemara (Megilla 16a) offers another explanation. When Haman was commanded by King Ahasuerus to parade Mordechai through the streets of Shushan on horseback, the Midrash describes how Mordechai was too weak to mount the horse himself, and Haman had to bend down to serve as a human step. As Mordechai climbed up, he kicked Haman.

Haman protested: “Is it not written, ‘Do not rejoice when your enemy falls’?” Mordechai replied: “That applies to Jews, but regarding you, it is written, ‘You shall tread upon their high places.’”

Thus, the Talmud distinguishes between different situations: the prohibition of rejoicing applies to the fall of Jewish enemies, but regarding wicked people from among the nations, jubilation is permitted.

**The Song of the Angels at the Red Sea**

Another commonly cited source in this discussion is the Midrash regarding the angels’ desire to sing at the splitting of the Red Sea. The Midrash appears in Tractate Sanhedrin (39b), but also in other parallel sources, sometimes with variations[[1]](#footnote-1):

“Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: What is meant by ‘And one did not come near the other all night’ (Shemot 14:20)? At that moment, the ministering angels sought to sing before the Holy One, Blessed be He, but He said to them: ‘The works of My hands are drowning in the sea, and you are singing before Me?’”

This Midrash seems to imply that God Himself does not rejoice at the downfall of the wicked. Yet the Talmud continues, clarifying that while God does not rejoice, others may rejoice. In other words, people witnessing the downfall of the wicked may celebrate.

It appears that a distinction exists between angels and human beings. People are permitted to sing and rejoice at the downfall of the wicked, as the Israelites did at the Red Sea, but angels, like God, are not.

This would imply that this Midrash is not necessarily relevant to our question. Yet it is quoted regarding the recitation of Hallel.

In Shibbolei HaLeket (174), this Midrash is cited to explain why the complete Hallel is not recited on the seventh day of Passover:

“For all seven days of the festival we recite the complete Hallel, but on Passover we complete Hallel only on the first day and its night. Why? Shmuel ben Abba said: ‘Do not rejoice when your enemy falls’ — because the Egyptians drowned in the sea.”

The Talmud (Arakhin 10a) offers an additional explanation: we do not recite complete Hallel during the intermediate days of Passover because, unlike Sukkot, the sacrifices do not vary daily. However, the reason cited by Shibbolei HaLeket is also brought in the Beit Yosef (Orach Chaim 490). This explanation raises several questions:

If this is truly the reason, why is complete Hallel said on the first day of Passover, given that the Egyptians also drowned then?

According to this source: Why do we recite a “half” Hallel on Chol Hamoed?[[2]](#footnote-2)

Moreover, how can we justify the Song at the Sea itself, both recited at the time and in our prayers today?

Thus, it seems this explanation is not the central or primary reason for omitting complete Hallel on the seventh day of Passover.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef mentions this Midrash in a similar context. In his responsa, he ruled that Hallel should be recited on Israel’s Independence Day — but without a blessing. Why without a blessing? Among other reasons, he explains:[[3]](#footnote-3)

“It seems the reason we do not say Hallel on the seventh day of Passover is because the Egyptians drowned, as it says: ‘Do not rejoice when your enemy falls’… Similarly, in our case, since in the wars many Jews and non-Jews were killed, it is inappropriate to recite Hallel.”

But what about Chanuka, when we recite complete Hallel every day, despite many casualties? To this, Rabbi Ovadia responds:

“The Hallel of Chanuka is recited in gratitude for the miracle of the oil…”[[4]](#footnote-4)

However, he also quotes the Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai):

“…He wrote that the statement ‘the works of My hands are drowning, and you sing’ applies only at the moment of judgment (the drowning itself), but once the judgment has been completed and the miracle revealed, it is permitted to sing. Even King David did not sing until after the wicked had fallen.”

Thus, the Chida distinguishes between the “moment of wrath,” when it is inappropriate to recite Hallel, and the later reflection on the miracle, when it becomes permissible. According to this conclusion, this Midrash does not serve as a source to prohibit Hallel in our times over the downfall of the wicked.

Still, the wording of the Midrash, as quoted earlier, suggests some discomfort with rejoicing over the downfall of the wicked. Is that truly so?

As hinted, this Midrash appears in greatly varying versions. The Maharsha in Sanhedrin notes parallel sources that reverse the meaning entirely.

For example, in Midrash Rabba (Shemot Rabba (Vilna) Parashat Beshalach Parashat 23) a different version appears:

“Rabbi Yochanan said: The angels sought to sing before the Holy One, Blessed be He, that night when Israel crossed the sea, but He did not permit them. He said: ‘My legions are in distress, and you would sing before Me?’ But once Israel emerged from the sea, the angels came to sing before God. He said: ‘Let My children go first,’ as it says: ‘Then Moses sang.’”

This version differs significantly. Here, the angels wanted to sing before the splitting of the sea. The relevant verse is “And one did not come near the other all night,” which describes the separation between the Israelite and Egyptian camps before the sea was split. The Midrash compares this to “One called to the other,” describing the angels’ daily songs. The meaning is clear: when “My legions are in distress,” meaning Israel trapped between Egypt and the sea, the angels must not sing their daily song. But after the miracle, the angels may sing, and Israel leads with Az Yashir.

Thus, this version permits and even encourages song and Hallel for miracles — even if the wicked perish.

**Song in the Bible**

There are many songs in the Bible, usually easy to identify by their poetic structure. The Talmud (Megilla 16b) describes two literary patterns found in the Bible’s songs:

“Rabbi Shila of Kefar Tamarta expounded: All the songs are written ‘half-brick over whole-brick and whole-brick over half-brick,’ except this song (at the Sea) and the one about the kings of Canaan, which are ‘half-brick over half-brick and whole-brick over whole-brick.’”

This refers to the unique columnar structure of biblical songs.

The most famous songs are Az Yashir in Sefer Shemot, Deborah’s Song in Shoftim, and David’s Song in Shmuel. All share the theme of praising God after victory and the destruction of enemies. In some cases, the examples are even more extreme: Yehoshua 12 lists the conquered Canaanite kings like a poem, and Esther 9 presents the ten sons of Haman in poetic form. These examples strongly suggest that the Bible permits and even encourages celebrating victories over enemies in song.

However, it’s important to note that this is not petty or vindictive joy, but rather joy over the victory, expressed through gratitude to God, who operates both behind the scenes and openly to protect His people, destroy their enemies (who are His enemies), and bring salvation to Israel.

**Conclusion**

While there may be a common sentiment against rejoicing over the downfall of Israel’s enemies, as we’ve demonstrated, there are few clear sources supporting that view. Rabbinic literature presents differing approaches, reflected in varying textual traditions. Yet the plain meaning of the biblical texts clearly supports singing praises to God during wartime over the destruction of the wicked — it is permitted, and even praiseworthy.

1. Rabbi Yehoshua Menachem Rosenberg discusses the different texts of this midrash see :: בנפול אויבך אל תשמח –

   ובאבוד רשעים רינה היחס אל אבדן האויב במאמרי חז״ל/

   https://www.daat.ac.il/daat/ktav\_et/maamar.asp?ktavet=2&id=1392 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rabbi yitzchack Mirski discusses this question in his book.see 89 הגיוני הלכה , מוסד הרב קוק, תש״ן [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. שו"ת יביע אומר חלק ו ,או"ח סימן מא

   Compare to a similar formulation in Tanchuma (Buber) (Parashat Beshalach Siman 13: When they came up from the sea, Israel and the ministering angels sought to sing a song. Rabbi Avin Halevi said, What is this like? To a king who went down to war and was victorious, and his son and servant came with a crown in their hand to place on the head of a king. They came to the king and said to him, Your son and your servant are standing with a crown in their hand, who will enter first? He said to them, you fools in the world, My servant before my son?! My son will enter first. Thus, when Israel came up from the sea, Israel and the ministering angels came to sing a song, the Blessed One said to the ministering angels, Let Israel go first, then Moses [and the children of Israel] will sing [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I do not understand this answer. It seems that the recitation of Hallel during the days of Chanuka is about the war. See Rabbi Aryeh Pomeranczyk, Emek Berakha, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)