

RIPPLE IN STILL WATER

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PSHAT

The Grateful Dead - Robert Hunter wrote this song in 1970 in London. Jerry Garcia wrote the music to this song. The song debuted August 18, 1970, at Fillmore West in San Francisco. *Words did Glow* - How do words glow? Words glow when they ring true. Words glow when they resonate with someone. *Gold of Sunshine* - Sunshine is brilliant and priceless. It warms us, feeds us through photosynthesis, and raises our moods. Sunshine causes the earth to glow in the void of space. Sunshine causes words to glow on a piece of paper; without the light radiating from the sun, there is no black, white or even a touch of Grey. *Harp unstrung* - The harp is a beautiful instrument. Yet until it is strung, it remains silent, its potential is not realized until someone strings it and plays it. It is also possibly an allusion to “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion. There on the poplars we hung up our lyres, for our captors asked us there for songs, our tormentors, for amusement, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” (Psalms 137:1-3) This speaks of the pain of being silenced. *Would you hear my voice* - Both the harp and our vocal cords are played in the same way, by making the air around the “strings” resonate, which creates sound. In fact, Sacred Harp Music is playing the human voice as an instrument. *Would you hold it near, as it were your own* - In order for my words to be heard, you (a listener) needs to be able to make my tunes with your voice. Remember, my harp, my vocal cords, are unstrung-are not capable of being played. You will need to sing my song. “My tunes” must be a collaboration/ partnership of the would-be-singer and the listener. *It's a hand-me-down, the thoughts are broken*-This is reminiscent of any oral tradition handed down *L'dor v dor* from generation to generation as an unbroken chain. *Better left unsung* - When Elijah went to engage with God at Mount Sinai we read, “And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.” (Kings 1 19:11-12) While Elijah thinks that God might be found in the large scale sensory experiences, God is in fact uniquely to be found in the subtle quiet moments when things are left unsung. *I don't know, don't really care* - On a simple level it would stand to reason that if the author did know they might actually care. *Let there be songs to fill the air* - As we see in at the start of Creation, God is a *Ruach*, wind/spirit, that fills the air. *Ripple* - A Ripple is a very small wave. It comes from earlier meaning of "stretch of shallow, rippling water". *Still water* - In the second sentence of the Torah God caused a wind to blow across the face of the depths and began Creation. Amazing as a standalone, yet the word wind in Hebrew (*Ruach*) denotes both wind and spirit. *Nor wind to blow*- God's *Ruach* is the Prime Mover. (Genesis 1:2) *Cup be empty* - This is an allusion to Psalms. There we read, “Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup is overflowing.” (Psalm 23:4-5) If you reach out and there is nothing there to support you, you are truly alone in the valley of darkness. *Let it be known there is a fountain* - This might be an allusion to Miriam's well. Miriam was the water bearer, she nourished Israel as we walked in the wilderness. Without Miriam there was no water in their wells (Numbers 20:1-2). *By the hands of men* - This might mean that human kind cannot build this kind of well. *There is a road* - This might allude to the *Tao*, *Derech*, or path upon which each of us walk in our lives. *Between the dawn and the dark of night* - These are the traditional waking hours of a diurnal creature (humans, amongst others). *No one may follow* - One of the perils of leadership is that one puts themselves out there and others might not follow. *Your steps alone* - Rabbi Hillel taught, “Do not judge your fellow until you come to his place.” (Avot 2:4) On this path of life the steps that we take are the way, *Halacha*- Jewish law. Each of us are judged on our own path. While none of us should judge each other, it is also important to recognize how we as a community might support each other on our respective paths. *You who choose to lead must follow* - In order to lead, one needs to know how to follow. Each leader must have a guide, a mentor, in life. Great leadership is knowing where and who the signposts are. *If I knew the way I would take you home* - There is a place called home, but “you” denotes that that place is yours alone. No one else knows the way to your home. All someone else can do for you is lend you a tune that you can dance to on your way home.

and men cannot do it. What role does gender play in impacting the world around us. *There is a road* - In Robert Frost's “The Road Not Taken” he wrote,” Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by / And that has made all the difference.” It is one thing to take a simple highway. It's another thing to take a road that has twists and turns and will change you as you travel on it. How many of us choose this road? Also what is the difference between a road and a highway? Highways are built for speeds that do not allow the traveler to take notice of their surroundings. Highways are simple because they rely on force to go through things/nature; their construction is based on moving obstacles out of the way. Highways have been laid down with little to no regard for how they affect their surroundings. They have been engineered for mass transportation of goods. They are shallow in their thoughtlessness. Roads are slower and more thoughtful; they meander around obstacles and allow travelers to pay attention to their surroundings. Old roads followed animal trails that crossed the land in organic, intentional patterns, from waterhole to food. Roads encourage the traveler to interact with obstacles, even if trying to avoid them. There is a trend in our modern lives to engineer our lives like highways, live fast and shallow lives. Keep your eyes on the screen, order through the screen, distract through the screen. Our struggle may be to keep our lives on a slow pace, to meander and notice our surroundings, to live real life by feeling real thoughts, smelling real smells and being distracted by real beauty. Stay the course of the road and avoid the highway. *Between the dawn and the dark of night* - This might refer to the first lines, “If my words did glow with the gold of sunshine.” What is the moment before the dawn of that gold of sunshine? This is *Netz Hachama*, the morning twilight, the optimal time to recite the Shema. This is a moment when we are open to faith and open to what the day may bring. This liminal time is echoed with the moment at the end of the day when the glow of the gold sunshine is setting. This time is called *Beyn HaShemashot*, the evening dusk. During the first week of creation at this time right before that first Shabbat some of the most important miracles were set in motion, including Miriam's well (Avot 5:6) These are both liminal times teeming with home and full of miracles. *And if you go no one may follow* - There is always a risk when taking a lead that one will end up going it alone on the path. Ultimately, we have to trust ourselves. We will be just fine in our own, unique, individualized path. There is no guarantee that anyone will ever follow us when we take a risk, so first and foremost, we must follow paths for ourselves. When Moshe went to the top of Mount Sinai, he took a risk that perhaps, no one would follow him. When he did return down to the base of the mountain, the Israelites had - in fact - made a Golden Calf as idol workshop. They chose to follow the Golden Calf and not his leadership. Over time they came to follow his leadership. The path toward leadership is often lonely and rarely straight. *Your steps alone* - The road that you are taking, not the highway, is your road. No one can walk in your shoes. No one is you, you are alone on your road. Unless, perhaps, you allow someone's tunes to become your own and hold it near as it were your own. *If I knew the way I would take you home* - We are all trying to get home. As we learn in Ecclesiastes, “All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from where the rivers come, there they return again”(Ecclesiastes 1:7). The journey is never complete and the sea is never full. We are all still just ripples in the water.

DRASH

Words did Glow - How do words glow? "Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish said: The Torah given to Moshe was written with black fire upon white fire, sealed with fire, and swathed with bands of fire.” (Yerushalmi Shelamim 6:1) It's like Bob Dylan saying the sun is chicken. “The Sun's not yellow, it's chicken!” (Tombstone Blues) The context defines the meaning. Once we allow the absurdity to redefine reality, these words start making sense. *Gold of Sunshine* - When there is no sunshine, things become more muted, more greyed out. The Grateful Dead have a song called Touch of Grey that might be a parallel to “Gold of Sunshine”. Interesting that song is on an album called “In the Dark.” A ‘Touch of Grey’ may refer to the greying of hair, of people getting older. As anything on earth gets older, it greys out (partly due to the drying/bleaching effects of the sun, which gave it color in the first place!). Similarly we see Isaac being old with his eyes fading (Genesis 27:1). He could not see the “Gold of Sunshine.” Isaac's inability to discern between dark and light caused the schism in his family between Jacob and Esev. Perhaps our goal is to have the gold of sunshine/light, guide our path in life. *I don't know, don't really care* - On a deeper level, it alludes to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they ate of the Tree of Knowledge. Before they ate this fruit, neither of them had a care in the world.

And in this context the “song to fill the air” is the sound of God walking in the garden (Genesis 3:1). *Would you hear my voice* - Does this suggest that the previous line (And my tunes were played on a harp unstrung) might be vocal cords that are non- existent? This might suggest silence. In the Talmud in a discussion about how someone might know when it is midnight we learn, “Rabbi Shim'on Hasida said: 'David hung his harp above his bed and when midnight would arrive the north wind would blow upon the harp (vibrating the strings) and causing music to emanate.'” (Berachot 3b) It seems that the wind caused a ripple across David's harp as an alarm to stir him from slumber. *Would you hold it near as it were your own* - Can something sung resonate with others? Can words create reality? This might be the antitheses of the partnership we have at the end of the song. This might suggest my thoughts/tunes can co-opt another's. Or it might suggest that we are one, as the *Shema* makes clear. Listen Israel...God is one. Does this suggest a unity in the world? That we together, tunes and strung harp (voice) are perfection? That our one voice is perfect, but the one voice needs to be a partnership of our/multiple voices. *Better left unsung* - If there can't be a unity between one's tunes and another's hearing, then perhaps the leader should remain as silent as a “harp unstrung.” *Let there be songs to fill the air* - Just as God creates something from nothing, so to song leaders cause change by sharing music or even a moment of silence. *Ripple* - How is there movement in something still? The vibration that causes the sound in a harp or in a voice is like a Ripple. When looking at a mirror - glass, water, etc. - there's an action in the deep reflection. It is in moments like these that we contemplate God's or our own existence. Like David or Elijah we try to unlock the nuance and diving nature of the world and ourselves. In these still small moments we see the miracles in the mundane. *Nor wind to blow* - Wind is necessary for sound from the harp and our voices. The word Ruach denotes both wind and spirit. God's Spirit/wind sweeping across the face of the water may actually be *playing* Creation into existence.

There is a Native American (*Tlingit*) tale of a boy who went out in a canoe to fish. But the wind was so strong he could not get to the fishing grounds. He asked his mother where the wind comes from. She told him that Eagle flaps his wings high up in the mountain. The boy made a net and climbed high in the mountains to find Eagle and throw the net over Eagle to stop the wind. Once he did this, he went back to his canoe to paddle to the fishing grounds. When he got to the fishing grounds, the boy found that the fish had died because the wind had stopped blowing. He went to farm the land, yet the crops were dead because there was no wind to bring the rain. The boy realized that the wind was responsible for keeping the world moving and healthy. So he climbed back into the mountains and cut the net and set Eagle free. Once Eagle's wings started to flap again the fish returned and the crops were watered. The boy became a man of the wind. This hints at the *Ein Sof* (the ineffable, unknowable end, aka God). The wind goes around infinitely making the symphony which is the world. *By the hands of men* - While the plain meaning is that human kind cannot build this kind of well, the deeper meaning is that the hands of men are destroying the world. Our drive to dominate nature has caused us to ruin the perfect Creation of Earth. Why are we never satisfied (*v'savata*) with our portion? Our jealousy and stubbornness is a source of our destruction. Another reading is that it takes the agency of a woman like Miriam to make the water flow