

Gerald Cohen

Lo Vashamayim Hi
(It is not in the heavens)

for solo voice and piano
(2021)

PERUSAL SCORE

Program note by composer Gerald Cohen:

“Lo Vashamayim Hi” (It is not in the heavens) was composed in 2021 for the *Noli Me Tangere* project of the Center for Religion and the Human, Indiana University, Bloomington.

The prompt for the project begins as follows:

Noli me tangere—“touch me not” (or “Do not hold/grasp me” in the Greek). The words from John 20:17, spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene after her discovery of the empty tomb, take on curious resonances in the epoch of COVID-19, with its prohibitions on touching and imperatives around social distancing. We wish to ask how we might consider *noli me tangere* in this moment—this long moment being shaped by the pandemic.

The project leaders then encouraged all participants to use the prompt of the text to act as a jumping-off point to explore whatever felt significant to them in the words and their resonances.

As a composer and cantor, I am quite steeped in the Hebrew Bible, and much less so in the New Testament. It has been fascinating for me to use the prompt of this project as an impetus to explore new texts. When I learned that the Greek of “noli me tangere” could perhaps be better translated as “do not cling to me,” the words suddenly resonated with me quite deeply, and also created connections in my mind with both Jewish and Christian and mystical traditions—of God being truly within each one of us—and with Buddhist ideas of non-attachment.

After an exploration of many texts, including several of the non-canonical Gnostic Gospels, and poems of Rilke and Tagore, I found myself drawn back to a favorite text from the most familiar part of my own religious tradition—the Torah. In Deuteronomy, Chap. 30, Moses instructs the people: “It is not in the heavens, that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?’ But the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.” This saying is also echoed by Jesus, presumably referring directly to the text from Deuteronomy, in both the canonic and the gnostic gospels.

The first two sections of the piece, relating the quest to find the divine in the heavens or beyond the sea, are heard as dramatic, energetic outpourings, these then resolve into the gentle extended meditation of “But the thing is very close to you. . . .”

Text: Deuteronomy 30:12-14

Lo vashamayim hi leimor:

"Mi ya'aleh lanu hashamaymah v'yikacheha lanu v'yashmi'enu otah v'na'asenah?"

V'lo me'ever layam hi leimor:

"Mi ya'avov lanu el ever hayam v'yikacheha lanu v'yashmi'enu otah v'na'asenah?"

Ki karov eilecha hadavar me'od, beficha uvilvavcha la'asoto.

It is not in the heavens, that you should say:

“Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?”

And it is not beyond the sea, that you should say:

“Who will cross over for us beyond the sea and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?”

But the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.

Deuteronomy 30:12-14

Lo Vashamayim Hi

(It is not in the heavens)

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Moderate ♩ = 72 *p* It is not in the heavens,

Voice: Lo va-sha - ma - yim hi, Lo va-sha - ma - yim hi,

Piano: *p* with Ped.

5 *p* Quite fast, with energy ♩ = 138 that you should say:

Lo va-sha - ma - yim hi - lei - mor:

Quite fast, with energy ♩ = 138

p 16th notes: *sempre legato*

9 let blur with Ped.

simile—all upstemmed notes in these figures are brought out

12 *p* "Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us

Mi ya - a - leh la - nu ha - sha - may - mah v' - yi - ka - che - ha

and let us hear it, that we may do it?"

15

la - nu v'-yash-mi - e - nu o - tah v' - na - a -

18 *mf*

se - nah,

20 *mp*

Mi ya - a - leh la nu ha sha - may - mah v' - yi - ka - che - ha

23

la - nu v'-yash-mi - e - nu o - tah v' - na - a -

26 *f*

se - nah,

LH

28 *f* *It is not in the heavens.*

Lo va - sha - ma - yim hi,

LH

30 *dim.*

Lo - sha - ma - yim

dim.

32 *mp*

hi.

molto rit.
(to slower than ♩ = 72)

p

And it is not beyond the sea,

V - lo me-e-ver la - yam hi,

molto rit.
(to slower than ♩ = 72)

Tempo I ♩ = 72

mp

p

continue to let blur with Ped.

36

V - lo me-e-ver la - yam hi, V - lo me-e - ver la-

41

rit. that you should say: **Quite fast, with energy** ♩ = 138

yam hi lei - mor:

rit. **Quite fast, with energy** ♩ = 138

p
16th notes: *sempre legato*

44

simile—all upstemmed notes in these figures are brought out

46

p "Who will cross over for us beyond the sea

Mi ya - a - vor la - nu el e - ver ha - yam v' - yi - ka -

48 *cresc.* and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?"

che - - - ha la - nu v' - yash - mi -

cresc.

This system contains measures 48 and 49. The vocal line features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 48 and a quarter note in measure 49. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

50 e - nu o - tah v' - na a - se - nah,

This system contains measures 50, 51, and 52. The vocal line has a triplet of eighth notes in measure 50 and a quarter note in measure 51. The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

53 *mf* Mi ya-a-vor la - nu el e - ver ha - yam v' - yi - ka -

mf

This system contains measures 53, 54, and 55. The vocal line features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 53 and a quarter note in measure 54. The piano accompaniment includes triplets in the left hand and continues with the eighth-note pattern in the right hand.

56 che - - - ha la - nu v' - yash - mi -

This system contains measures 56, 57, and 58. The vocal line has a quarter note in measure 56 and a quarter note in measure 57. The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

58 *f*

e - nu o - tah v' - na - a - se - nah,

61 *it is not beyond the sea.*

Lo me - e - ver la - yam hi,

64 *dim.*

me - e - ver la - yam

67 *molto rit.* *p*

hi. Ki ka -

molto rit.

Tempo I ♩ = 72

very broadly, spacious

sempre cantabile

But the thing is very close to you,

70

rov ei - le - cha ha - da - var m' -

p

Tempo I ♩ = 72
very broadly, spacious

p *sempre cantabile*
sempre molto legato

let blur with Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 70, 71, and 72. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a half note 'rov' in 4/4 time, followed by a quarter note 'ei' in 5/4 time, and a half note 'cha' in 4/4 time. The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with a flowing sixteenth-note pattern and a left hand with a simple bass line. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and *sempre cantabile* / *sempre molto legato*. A pedaling instruction 'let blur with Ped.' is present.

73

od, ni ka - rov ei -

Detailed description: This system contains measures 73, 74, and 75. The vocal line has a half note 'od,' in 4/4 time, followed by a quarter note 'ni' in 5/4 time, a half note 'ka' in 4/4 time, and a half note 'rov' in 5/4 time. The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include piano (*p*).

76

le - cha ha - da - var m' - od,

Detailed description: This system contains measures 76, 77, and 78. The vocal line has a half note 'le' in 5/4 time, a half note 'cha' in 4/4 time, a half note 'ha' in 4/4 time, a half note 'da' in 4/4 time, a half note 'var' in 4/4 time, and a half note 'm' - od,' in 5/4 time. The piano accompaniment features a more active right hand with sixteenth-note runs. Dynamics include piano (*p*).

79

b' - fi - cha u - vil - vav -

subito p

Detailed description: This system contains measures 79, 80, and 81. The vocal line has a half note 'b' -' in 5/4 time, a half note 'fi -' in 4/4 time, a half note 'cha' in 4/4 time, and a half note 'u - vil - vav -' in 4/4 time. The piano accompaniment has a right hand with a sixteenth-note pattern and a left hand with a bass line. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and *subito p*.

to do it.

83

cha — la — a — so — to,

87

b' — fi — cha u-vil - vav -

91

cha — a — a — so — to.

subito p

95

But very close to you...

take time... *a tempo*

Ki ka - rov ei -

take time... *a tempo*

99

sempre p

le - cha, _____ Ki ka - rov _____

103

ei - le - cha,

pp continue to let blur with Ped.

107

p Ki _____ ca - _____ ei - le - cha, _____ *pp* (humming) mm _____

112

rit. al fine -----

mm... *rit. al fine*