

Why Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" Is The Ultimate Thanksgiving Song (You'll Be Amazed By Its Meaning!)



Leonard Cohen, the hugely influential singer and songwriter died on November 2, 2016 at the age of 82. Cohen's "Hallelujah" was voted "the most perfect song ever."

Thanksgiving is a day to give thanks for the many blessings we have in our lives. Among the many things I am personally grateful for, I give a huge "Thank You!" to the late Leonard Cohen for all of the incredible songs he gave the world, but most especially for the song *Hallelujah*.

In *Hallelujah*, songwriter Cohen takes thankfulness to another level, suggesting that we should be grateful not only for our blessings, but for **ALL** of our experiences in life (good, bad, happy, and sad).

I first fell in love with the song when I watched k.d. lang sing it during the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada. I was captivated by the sheer beauty and majesty of her performance and the lyrics. And, I felt compelled to learn more about what the song was actually about.

In short, here's what songwriter Cohen said of the song's meaning:

"It explains that many kinds of hallelujahs do exist, and all the perfect and broken hallelujahs have equal value."

Cohen further elaborates on [the meaning of the song](#):

"Finally there's no conflict between things, finally everything is reconciled but not where we live. This world is full of conflicts and full of things that cannot be reconciled but there are moments when we can transcend the dualistic system and reconcile and embrace the whole mess and that's what I mean by Hallelujah. That regardless of what the impossibility of the situation is, there is a moment when you open your mouth and you throw open your arms and you embrace the thing and you just say 'Hallelujah! Blessed is the name.' And you can't reconcile it in any other way except in that position of total surrender, total affirmation. That's what it's all about."

The Most Perfect Song Ever Took Five Years to Write

In 2008, [Q Magazine](#) held a poll in which *Hallelujah* was voted "the most perfect song ever." According to Cohen, it took him at least five years to write the song:

"Hallelujah was at least five years. I have about 80 verses. I just took verses out of the many that established some sort of coherence. The trouble that I find is that I have to

finish the verse before I can discard it. So that lengthens the process considerably. I filled two notebooks with the song, and I remember being on the floor of the Royalton Hotel, on the carpet in my underwear, banging my head on the floor and saying, 'I can't finish this song.'"

Cohen trimmed the number of verses and released the song in 1984 on his album titled "Various Positions." But, the song did not receive popular acclaim until 1991 when John Cale, a Welsh singer-songwriter, recorded a cover version of the song.

Since 1991, more than 200 versions of *Hallelujah* have been recorded in various languages. A version performed by the late Jeff Buckley attained #1 on *Billboard's* Hot Digital Songs in March 2008. Singer k.d. lang's performance of fellow Canadian Cohen's song was for many (including myself) the highlight of the opening ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

The Meaning of Lyrics to *Hallelujah*

In the Bible, the word *hallelujah* is found primarily in the book of Psalms. The word *hallel* in Hebrew means a joyous praise in song. The second part, *Yah*, is a shortened form of YHWH, the name for the Creator. The word *hallelujah* can therefore be translated as "Praise God." *Hallelujah* is frequently spoken to express happiness that a thing hoped or waited for has happened.

Below are the lyrics to *Hallelujah* and one of the many interpretations of the lyrics from lyricinterpretations.com, this one by Francis O'Brien:

For the first part:

*Now I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord
But you don't really care for music, do you?
It goes like this
The fourth, the fifth*

*The minor fall, the major lift
The baffled king composing Hallelujah*

This relates to the story of King David who was had an intimate relation with God and was also a great harp player (secret cord/pleased the lord). The hallelujah at the end of this verse is a happy and spiritual one.

Second part:

*Your faith was strong but you needed proof
You saw her bathing on the roof
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you
She tied you
To a kitchen chair
She broke your throne, and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah*

In this part Cohen relates to the story of David and Bathsheba when David was walking on the roofs he saw her bathing and seduced her. He ended up committing adultery and lost a lot of influence and weakened his link with God (broken throne). Then we move to the story of Samson who gets his hair cut and loses all his powers, once again, a broken throne. In this verse, the hallelujah is a very sad and desperate one.

Third Part:

*Baby I have been here before
I know this room, I've walked this floor
I used to live alone before I knew you.
I've seen your flag on the marble arch
Love is not a victory march
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah*

In this part Cohen talks about the ambivalence of love and its effect on your faith. It can be glorious like a flag on a marble arch or it can be cold and broken. And when in heart

break you may lose or strengthen your faith, in this case it is strengthened because he still praises the lord in the end. In this case, the hallelujah is (obviously) cold and broken.

Fourth Part:

*There was a time you let me know
What's really going on below
But now you never show it to me, do you?
And remember when I moved in you
The holy dove was moving too
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah*

This is an obvious reference to sexuality... In this verse the hallelujah can be interpreted as an "orgasmic" one.

Fifth Part:

*You say I took the name in vain
I don't even know the name
But if I did, well really, what's it to you?
There's a blaze of light
In every word
It doesn't matter which you heard
The holy or the broken Hallelujah*

This is a reference to one of the ten commandments and through this Cohen is trying to make the listener understand that religion and faith is not etched in stone and that everyone should interpret the holy texts and religion in his own way and that there is no "Right Way" to believe. This is an uncertain hallelujah, meaning that he is not sure what to believe but he believes anyway.

Sixth Part:

*I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you*

*And even though
It all went wrong
I'll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah*

In this part, he has found what to believe in and realizes his past errors but he is ready to face the lord because he now has complete faith. This hallelujah is one of total faith and love for "the Lord".

For more great lyrics, see [wagon wheel chords](#) on CowBoyLyrics.com.

***Hallelujah* Performed by Pentatonix, k.d. lang, the late Jeff Buckley, and the late Leonard Cohen**

Which version do you like best?

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