

I've heard there was a secret cord
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, *1
The minor fall, the major lift,
The baffled king composing Hallelujah. *2

Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah

You say I took your name in vain *3
Though 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 ev'ry word *4
It doesn't matter what you heard
The holy or the broken Hallelujah

Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah

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 *5
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah

Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah

Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah

Vertaling:

Ik heb gehoord dat er een geheim akkoord was
Dat David speelde, en het beviel de Heer
Maar jij geeft niet echt om muziek, of wel?
Het gaat als volgt: De vierde, de vijfde
De kleine daling, de grote stijging
De verbijsterde koning die componeerde Halleluja

Halleluja

Je zegt dat ik je naam ijdel gebruikte
Maar ik ken de naam niet eens
Maar als ik dat deed, wat maakt dat uit voor jou?
Er is een gloed van licht in elk woord
Het maakt niet uit welke je hoorde
Het heilig of het gebroken Halleluja

Halleluja

Ik deed mijn best, het was niet veel
Ik kon niet voelen, dus probeerde ik aan te raken
Ik heb de waarheid verteld, ik ben niet gekomen om je voor de gek te houden
En zelfs al ging het allemaal verkeerd
Ik zal staan voor de Heer van het Lied
Met niets anders op mijn tong dan Halleluja

Halleluja

Uitleg bij de tekst

*1 "The line *'the fourth, the fifth / the minor fall, the major lift'* is in fact a description of the chord sequence taking place under those words."

*2 Hallelujah is a Hebrew word composed of the words "Hallelu" (Praise) and "Jah" (the short form of God's name, YHWH). David is described as being "baffled" (= verbijsterd) because the Hallelujah came to him so unexpectedly.

*3 In Judaism, there are many ways of referring to God. God's true name is said to be YHWH, but the vowels are unknown, and pronouncing the name is forbidden based on Exodus 20:7. Instead, observant Jews use the word "HaShem", which just means "The Name". Interestingly, the only people who could pronounce the name in ancient Israelite society were the priests (Cohanim). According to Maimonides, priests would pronounce God's name in the temple in Jerusalem as part of the Priestly Blessing. Leonard Cohen himself comes from a priestly family (the name Cohen means "priest" in Hebrew), and is familiar with the blessing, but does not know God's name. In the context of the following verses, it's clear that knowing God's name is a personal matter, not to be judged by others. "There is a blaze in every word": everyone has the right to see the divine in his or her own way. To an orthodox Jew, the word Hallelujah itself is forbidden outside of prayer. He knows that some people listening to this song will accuse of using G-d's name in vain. This is his response. Why can't I use G-d's name? I don't even know who he is. "What's it to you?" Why do you care?

*4 Both fire and light are associated with the divine. What Leonard Cohen is saying is that every word is just as holy as all others. This is incredibly important to understanding the song as a whole. See Cohen's Anthem for his conception of how the light gets through. In this case, words of song shine light, regardless of their context (i.e. holy vs. broken, it doesn't matter which you heard)

*5 In a 1985 interview, Leonard says: "All the perfect and broken Hallelujahs have an equal value. It's a desire to affirm my faith in life, not in some formal religious way but with enthusiasm, with emotion. The "Broken Hallelujah" is described earlier in the song. It means reaching the divine through sex, struggle, and despair. First, the woman "breaks your throne" in order to draw out the Hallelujah. Then it's said that "Love is not a victory march / It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah". The "Holy Hallelujah" is the divine in its pure form, referred to in the previous verse as something that was revealed in a previous time, when "Every breath we drew was Hallelujah"