

Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael chose to sing this song to Hashem. (15:1)

The *Shabbos* during which the *Shirah* is read is unique. Indeed, it is called *Shabbos Shirah* – the *Shabbos* of the Song. **Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Varka** once asked the *Chidushei HaRim* why the *Shabbos* on which we read the *Shirah* has become *Shabbos Shirah*, when this phenomenon does not occur on any other *Shabbos*. We do not refer to the *Shabbos* on which we read *Parashas Yisro* (which records *Kabbolas HaTorah*) as *Shabbos Mattan Torah*. Likewise, other *Shabbosos* do not derive their name from the contents of the *parsha* that we read on that particular week.

The **Chidushei HaRim** replied that the uniqueness of the *Shabbos* and its relationship with the *Shirah* are evident from the way the *Shirah* is written in the Torah, namely, *ariach al gabi ariach leveinah*, “brick on top of brick.” This is a reference to the way in which the text is written in the *Sefer Torah*. Rather than in straight long columns, it is written, “A half brick above a whole brick.” A half brick refers to the written part of the song, and the whole brick refers to the blank space which is twice the size of the written part. This format is followed throughout the *Shirah*. Thus, the *Shabbos* is given a special name, due to its uniqueness as evinced in the way it is written out in the Torah.

In honor of *Shabbos Shirah*, I have taken the liberty to relate a story that is perhaps more well known in *Chassidic* circles. Since it is “water related,” it is appropriate for this *Shabbos*. The **Mezritcher Maggid, zl**, announced to his students, “I see an overwhelming *chasheicha*, darkness, descending upon the world. It will envelop the Jewish world with devastating effects. He was referring to the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, which had a deleterious effect on German Jewry, before it spread its poisonous tentacles to the rest of western Europe and Russia. In order to prevent the desolation that would result from this spiritual infamy, the *Maggid* dispatched his two primary students, *Horav Shmelke* and his brother, *Horav Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz*. *Rav Shmelke* went to Nikolsburg and established a *yeshivah*. *Rav Pinchas*, the distinguished author of the *Sefer Haflaah*, went to Frankfurt. While these illustrious brothers did not succeed in changing the tide of assimilation, they did succeed in mentoring two young men who became giants in Torah and indefatigable fighters for Torah. *Rav Pinchas* was the *Rebbe* of the *Chasam Sofer*, and *Rav Shmelke* mentored *Rav Mordechai Binet*. These two giants of Torah fought relentlessly and successfully against the secular scourge created by the *Haskalah* movement.

When *Rav Shmelke* arrived in Nikolsburg, the Jewish community poured out *en masse* to greet him. He sat with his *Tallis* over his head and did not gaze beyond the immediate four cubits in front of him. Among those who approached the illustrious *Rav* was Moses Mendelssohn of Dessau. Mendelssohn was considered the father of the German Reform movement, a virulent form of secular perspective whose goal was to destroy Judaism as a religion and lower it to the level of a culture. Thus, the Jew would have no ties with G-d, since religion would no longer be a part of the Jewish portfolio. *Rav Shmelke* immediately pulled back his hand and said, “I want this *rasha*, evil

man, together with his followers, to be asked to leave this house!”

Mendelssohn did not take this insult lightly. He wasted no time in planning his revenge. He immediately dispatched a letter to the governor of Vienna stating that a new “Rabbi,” who is totally unschooled, has assumed the rabbinate in Nikolsburg. He stated that the *Rebbe* was not conversant in the German language and was unable to read or write in the mother tongue. *Rav Shmelke* was summoned to appear before the magistrate in Vienna. Mendelssohn’s henchmen arranged that the day of *Rav Shmelke*’s presentation would be Monday. To ensure that the *Rav* would not arrive on time, they saw to it that the letter arrive on Friday afternoon. There was no way that the *Rav* could reach the capitol by Monday – being that he was *Shabbos* observant.

When the letter arrived, *Rav Shmelke*’s family reacted as expected – with great fear. This was a set up. How could the *Rav* arrive on time? *Rav Shmelke* implored them not to worry. Everything would work out in due time. *Motzei Shabbos*, *Rav Shmelke* hired a driver and two assistants, and the small group set out for Vienna by carriage. Midway, the three men dozed off, “allowing” the horses to gallop to their hearts’ content. When the men woke up at day break, they were shocked to see that they were at the Danube River, on the outskirts of Vienna. *Rav Shmelke* sought a boat and captain to take him across the river. He was not successful, due to the climate. The frozen river was beginning to melt and it was difficult to navigate a boat between the large chunks of ice. If a boat were to be struck by ice, it would mean the end of the boat and its passengers. No one was moving. Finally, one of the shipmasters, sensing that *Rav Shmelke* was a holy man, stepped forth and agreed to take him across the Danube.

Meanwhile, the *Rav* of Prague, the venerable *Horav Yechezkel Landau, zl*, author of the *Noda b’Yehudah*, was well aware of Mendelssohn’s evil slander. He was close with *Rav Shmelke*, and, as a result, he had traveled to Vienna to intercede with his friends in the government. The *Noda b’Yehudah* and the mayor walked together to the banks of the Danube to watch the melting ice. Apparently, this was a sight to behold, and thousands poured out to watch this phenomenon annually. They were watching as the large chunks of ice were moving toward a small boat in which a regal man, a rabbi, stood praying.

What they did not know was that, as the ice came hurtling toward their boat, *Rav Shmelke* had stood up, and, with deep devotion, began reciting the *Shiras HaYam*. Miraculously, every block of ice that came toward them was “somehow” repelled, as their little boat made safe passage through the Danube. All this was witnessed by the government official who stood next to the *Noda b’Yehudah*. Unquestionably, *Rav Shmelke* was a holy man, but sanctity was not the criteria for a rabbinic position in Germany. The judge still had to see whether the complaint against *Rav Shmelke* was true or slanderous.

When the judge asked *Rav Shmelke* whether he spoke German, the *Rav* responded in impeccable German. When asked if he could write German, he proceeded to write an entire intellectual thesis in *HochDeutsch*, high German, the language spoken by royalty. Obviously, Mendelssohn’s

allegations had been vicious lies, which, sadly, have been the trademark of his followers throughout history.

Rav Shmelke was granted permission to punish his detractors. He refused, but asked them to leave Nikolsburg. They moved to Berlin, where their nefarious impact was felt for the next century.