

So now, write this song. (31:19)

The *Talmud Megillah* 3A relates the conversation that occurred between Yehoshua *bin* Nun and a Heavenly angel that visited him. The purpose of citing the conversation is to prove that *limud haTorah*, the study of Torah, is more stringent than sacrificial service: “The angel said to Yehoshua, ‘This afternoon, you neglected to offer the *Korban Tamid Shel Bein Ha’Arbaim*, daily afternoon sacrifice, and now (after dark) you neglected the study of Torah.’ (This conversation took place during the battle for Yericho, shortly after *Bnei Yisrael* entered the Land and performed circumcisions on the men who had not been circumcised in the wilderness. During the stress of entering the Land and performing the circumcisions, Yehoshua had allowed the people to neglect Torah study. During the day, when they were engaged in battle, they were exempt from study. At night, however, when the fighting stopped, they were no longer exempt.) Yehoshua asked the angel, ‘For which of these two misdeeds did you come?’ The angel replied, ‘*Atah basi*, I have come now,’ which implies that he came to rebuke him for the sin that was presently being transgressed, the neglect of Torah study.”

Tosfos asks how *Chazal* derived from the vernacular of the *pasuk* that the sins were the neglecting of the *Korban Tamid* and failure to study Torah. They explain that Yehoshua asked, “*Halanu atah*, Are you with us” (or with our enemies)? The word *halanu*, according to *Tosfos*, refers to the *lanu* of *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe*, “The Torah which Moshe commanded us.” To this the angel responded, “*Atah basi*, I have come now,” which, according to *Tosfos*, refers to the above *pasuk*, *V’atah kisvu lachem es ha’shirah ha’zos*, “So now, write this song,” which is a reference to Torah. In his *Minchas Asher*, **Horav Asher Weiss, Shlita**, questions why Yehoshua alluded to the *pasuk*, *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe*, which clearly relates to Torah study. On the other hand, in his response, the angel alluded to the *pasuk*, *V’atah kisvu lachem es ha’shirah ha’zos*, which addresses the *mitzvah* of *kesivas Sefer Torah*, writing a Torah scroll. First, they should have alluded to the same *pasuk*. Second, how is the writing of a Torah scroll, which in the *pasuk* is referred to as a *shirah*, song, connected to Torah study?

The *Rav* offers an insightful explanation, which teaches us an important *yesod*, principle, concerning the *mahus*, essential nature, of Torah, thus, suggesting a deeper understanding of the *mitzvah* of Torah study. The angel understood that during wartime the *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah* is suspended. It was a *milchemes mitzvah*, a holy war, which only they could carry out. While nighttime is not a time of battle, a soldier must rest; otherwise, he will not be able to hold his own during the next day’s battle. Furthermore, we have a rule that, *osek b’mitzvah patur min ha’mitzvah*, one who is actively involved in carrying out one *mitzvah* is exempt from performing another one. The Jews were not battling a discretionary war. This was *kibbush ha’aretz*, conquering the Land, which is a *mitzvah*. Thus, they should have been exempt from Torah study. Why did the angel rebuke Yehoshua?

The angel demanded of Yehoshua to realize that the Torah was not only a *mitzvah* from which the Jewish soldiers could be exempted. Torah is also a *shirah* – a song; thus, it has an altogether

different character. A song bursts forth from one's heart; it emerges as a result of unbridled passion that springs forth in a song of praise. It is passion rising to impulse, erupting in an expression of song. Yes, there is Torah: the code of Jewish Law; the blueprint for Jewish life; Hashem's eternal gift to His People. There is also Torah: the song of the heart; the praise which "explodes" from within the Jew; a song which cannot be continued due to its overwhelming and overpowering expression of love for Hashem.

The angel intimated to Yehoshua: The *mitzvah* of *limud ha'Torah* might be suspended due to the exigency of war, but how can you contain yourselves? How can your love refrain from the self-expression of *Shiras Ha'Torah*? When one feels the urge to sing, he must sing! How can a Jew restrain himself from studying Torah?

Hashem assures *Klal Yisrael* that Torah will never be forgotten, regardless of the adversity and bitter travail which have been our companions throughout our tumultuous history. Torah will always be at our side. I think the fact that the Torah is a *shirah*, a heartfelt expression of love that bursts forth from us, is the reason that it is always with us. People do not forget a tune. It becomes ingrained in their psyche and remains with them – always: "Then this song shall speak up before it is a witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring" (*Devarim* 31:21).

A Torah scholar was interned in a concentration camp together with his nephew. The young boy had lost everyone. All he had left in this world was his uncle, the *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar. The uncle and nephew spent their free time studying *Talmud Moed Katan* together. The uncle knew that his allotted time on this world was rapidly reaching its end. Every day, more of his contemporaries, men who had prematurely aged from the oppression and pain, were of no use to the labor force. When the time came for the uncle to take leave of his precious charge, when he saw death staring him in the face, his last request to his nephew was not to remember him, not to say *Kaddish* for him; rather, his request was, "My child, promise that, if you survive, you will finish this *meseches* of *Moed Katan*."

What thought preoccupied the mind of this *kadosh*, Jewish martyr, shortly before he died? What ran through his mind amid the misery and privation that enveloped him? That the Talmud should be studied! This was his last wish on earth. Finish the *meseches*. Torah may not be forgotten. This was not a man gone mad due to the pressure. This was a man who was conveying his most important legacy to his nephew: continue learning. Finish what we started – and continue on to the next *meseches*. Pass on the "tune" to the next generation. The Torah is our song. It is the secret of our survival.

Perhaps, we can take this idea to the next level. A song implies perfect harmony, with every note fused together to create a flowing score. The Torah is like a symphony in which all the elements, the various instruments of the orchestra, the voices of the choir, the musical score, all join together to create a perfect harmony. While this most certainly is true of the Torah, the one who studies Torah must himself represent *shirah*. His life-- actions, relationships with Hashem and with his

fellow man-- must all reflect a perfect symbiosis, a fusion of Torah, righteousness, *chesed*, loving kindness, *Yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Hashem, and *middos tovos*, positive character traits. These all meld together to make him a *ben Torah* who, by his very essence, comprises a song of praise to Hashem.

I came across a vignette about *Horav Eliyahu Moshe Shisgal, zl*, that puts the above thought into perspective. *Rav* Shisgal was a unique individual who represented the symphony of Torah. He represented everything positive about Torah. Shortly after his untimely *petirah*, passing, his *rebbetzin* received the following letter.

“With tears rolling down my face, I must relate how your late husband saved my family from much pain. Six years ago, your husband visited my store. I cannot remember why he came, I just remember him coming through the door, and it suddenly hit me, ‘This is the man I should talk with. He would listen to my problem. He would help me.’

“My son had earlier that week announced that he was getting married – to an Italian girl. The event would take place in a few months; the girl’s family had approved the match. It was a done deal. I could not do a thing. My son was a man, twenty-four years old, independent, with a mind of his own. I was far from Mr. Religious, since I only attended the synagogue twice a year. The *Rav* agreed to meet with my son in a week’s time. He left the store, and I waited every minute of that week’s time. Finally, a week passed, and your husband once again visited my store. My son was there waiting. He was doing me a favor. They left together, the *Rav* and my son, for a walk around the block that took all of fifteen minutes. When they returned, my son said nothing; the *Rav* said goodbye and that was it. The next morning, my son came over and said to me, ‘Dad, if we have such a great man among our people, I cannot marry out of the faith.’ The subject was closed. Our family’s ordeal had ended.

“So you see, your husband saved many people from heartache. My son went on to marry a nice Jewish girl, and just last week they registered their little girl in an Orthodox day school. We have lost a good public relations man for Judaism. Who can replace him?”

When Torah is more than a book of law, when it is the defining guide, the moral and ethical compass for our lives, it transforms us into a *shirah*, a song, a perfect harmonious symphony of praise to our Creator. *V'rau kol ha'amim ki Shem Hashem nikra alecha*, “Then all the peoples of the earth will see that Hashem’s Name is proclaimed over you, and they will revere .” (*Devarim* 28:10) A Jew who is symbiotically connected with the Torah becomes an example for others to emulate.

When *Rav* Shisgal left the hospital at the end of what was to be his last stay, a nurse called out, “Come everyone! The Rabbi is leaving!” The *Rav* entered the elevator, with every last nurse trailing behind him. At that moment, one of the nurses exclaimed, “There goes a beautiful man!” *Rav* Shisgal embodied a synthesis of pure Torah with *yiraas Shomayim*, *mussar*,

middos tovos and *chesed*. He reflected the beauty of *Yiddishkeit* in his entire demeanor.