

Everyone who comes to perform service (the work) of a service and the work of carrying (lit. burden) in the Ohel Moed. (4:47)

The *Talmud Arachin* 11a seeks a Scriptural source for the obligation to have song in the *Bais HaMikdash*. Ten sources are cited and one of them is from the above *pasuk*: *La'avod avodas avodah*, "To perform the service of a service." *Chazal* ask and others respond, "Which service requires another service? We must say that this refers to song." An earlier source quoted by the *Talmud* employs the *pasuk* in *Devarim* 28:47 to provide the reason for the various calamities visited on the Jewish People: *Tachas asher lo avadita es Hashem Elokecha b'simchah u'betuv leivav*, "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and goodness of heart." According to this interpretation of the *pasuk*, the Torah seems to treat the *mitzvah* of song with uncommon stringency. The commentators offer a number of reasons for the unusual power of song: It drives away depression, which is the root of much of our sinful behavior. One who is satisfied and happy develops a positive self-esteem and does not get depressed. Also, song can elevate the soul to the heights of prophecy.

The *Ein Yaakov* writes concerning the glory and splendor of song, that the beauty and goodness of the world of man, the world of angels and the Heavenly world of Hashem all correspond to the music and songs of praise. The soul is inspired by music to arise and ascend from the physical/mundane world in which we live to the Heavenly abode of the Creator.

In his commentary to *Divrei HaYamim* II, 29:25, *Rashi* writes that, while the Torah does not explicitly state that a *korban*, sacrifice, must be accompanied by song, our Sages derive its significance and requirement from the words, *Avodas avodah*, "service of service." The service of bringing the sacrifice requires a musical accompaniment. The *koach ha'neginah*, power of song/melody, is underscored in the *Sifrei Kabbalah*. Indeed, *Sefer Chassidim* writes that one should seek out and select melodies that are sweet and pleasant and apply them to his *tefillah*, prayer service. These melodies gladden one's heart and allow him to better express his praise of Hashem.

In his *sefer Nitzotzos*, *Horav Yitzchok Hershkowitz, Shlita*, relates a number of episodes in which the compelling effect of a song has had a major effect on a person. His first episode is concerning the *Talmidei Ha'Gra*, students of the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*, shortly after his *petirah*, passing. It was just before *Simchas Torah*, the happiest day of the year, a time when all Torah-loving Jews celebrate with Hashem's greatest gift to His People – the Torah. Yet, this group of devoted Torah students who had recently suffered the loss of their holy mentor were steeped in mourning. They grieved for their *Rebbe*; they grieved for themselves.

"How can we even begin to celebrate *Simchas Torah* without our *Rebbe*? True, there are *Sifrei Torah* in the *Aron HaKodesh*, Holy Ark, but we are missing our *Rebbe*, the living embodiment of a

Torah scroll.” They wept and wept. A few hours went by, and the *Gaon*’s primary disciple, *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, arose and banged his hand on the *bimah*, lectern, to call everyone to attention. Once they quieted down, *Rav Chaim* asked, “Do any one of you have an idea where our beloved *Rebbe*’s *neshamah*, soul, presently rests? Can you imagine in whose proximity he sits?”

It was a very powerful question, but these were not simple Jews. They were scholars who had a far greater perception of the workings of Heaven than the average man. One student conjectured, “He most certainly sits in the proximity of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, author of the *Zohar HaKadosh*. After all, our *Rebbe* expended great effort in understanding and explaining the depths of *Kabbalah*.” Another student felt that, indeed, the *Gaon* was sitting in the midst of the great *Tannaim* and *Amoraim*, since by elucidating their comments he had made their words accessible to the Torah world. Yet another student suggested that the *Rebbe* was surrounded by the *Rashba* and *Ramban* for having aspired to – and attained – their level of greatness in Torah.

When they had all completed their suggestions, *Rav Chaim* summed up, “One thing is for certain – our *Rebbe* has acquired for himself a most lofty place in the *Olam Habba*. To this we all agree. Now, let us go back to a moment shortly before our *Rebbe*’s mortal body left this world. Remember how he bemoaned the fact that in this world for a few pennies one can purchase a pair of *tzitzis* which will earn him immeasurable reward for the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*. In *Olam Habba*, however, it is all over. One can no longer earn reward. He either has earned it here in this world, or it is too late. Therefore, *Rebbe* wept bitterly that he was leaving this world of spiritual opportunity. It was over! Despite the incredible reward in store for *Rebbe*, he would rather have remained here!”

At that climactic moment, he burst out in song, “*Olam Habba* is a *gutte zach, lernen*

Torah is a *beser zach*. *Varf avek fun dir der yoch, lernen Torah nach un nach* – The World to Come is a good thing; studying Torah is a better thing. Throw away the yoke from yourself and learn Torah more and more.”

When the *Gra*’s students heard this, they all arose from their seats and began to sing in honor of the Torah. They sang and danced for the privilege of being able to remain in this world to achieve growth in Torah. The lyrics of the song, with its lively melody, catapulted them out of their melancholy, as they now understood the significance of the gift of life.

Before we continue, an understanding and appreciation of the power of music is in order. Music has the amazing power to sweep us up in its rhythm. We might be in no particular mood, or even in a negative mood, but as soon as we hear a lively tune, a joyous musical score, the beat envelops us. In just a few moments, we are transported to an entirely different sphere. Our mood has been altered. Our low spirits begin to dissipate, as a sense of hope takes hold of us. Lovers of music will attest to its power to captivate and mold their deepest emotions. Indeed, some individuals hum a tune throughout the day.

Rhythm captivates – but its feeling is temporary. Only music has the power to entrance and engage the individual on a more lasting basis. While rhythm plays a critical role in establishing the energy and mood of the music, it is the melody that speaks to the heart and soul. In Torah terms, the melody is on a higher level than the rhythm. The next level is “holy music,” a term applied to a melody emanating deep from within the recesses of the soul. *Horav Shaul Taub, zl*, the second *Modzitzer Rebbe*, would say, “I sing from an overflowing heart.” Such melodies are far more than entertainment. It reflects a deep-rooted holy wisdom. To paraphrase *Horav Nachman Breslover, zl*, “Know that every wisdom in the world has its own unique song and melody; it is from this song that this wisdom is actually derived. And so, from level to level, a higher wisdom has an even more exalted song and melody.”

When we talk about the significance of music, a name that immediately comes to mind is Modzitz. This small town in Poland was host to a *Chassidic* Rabbinic lineage which did not view song and music as merely an adjunct to prayer, nor was its melody simply a manner of liturgical expression. In Modzitz, music was the very essence of spirituality, the primary path towards achieving true *avodah sheh'b'lev*, service of the heart. *Horav Yechezkel, zl, m'Kuzmir*, ancestor of the first *Modzitzer Rebbe*, felt that he could not commence *Shabbos* until he had composed a new *niggun*, song. It was an essential requisite for his *Shabbos* experience.

The founder of the Modzitz dynasty was *Horav Yisrael Taub, zl*, author of the *Divrei Yisrael*. He emphasized song as a primary component of Jewish worship. While he composed hundreds of *niggunim*, the song by which he is most remembered is entitled, *Ezkerah*, “I Will Remember,” a compelling melody composed at a time of great travail. It happened in his later years, when he had to undergo a serious surgical procedure during which his leg was to be amputated. Weakened by his disease, the physicians feared for his life if they put him under anesthesia. They knew, however, that without the surgery, the *Rebbe's* chances of living were nil. In a quandary, they asked the *Rebbe* what to do. He offered a unique suggestion: He would compose a *niggun*. As soon as the doctors saw that he was completely engrossed in the song, they should begin to operate.

That is what they did. As they performed the painful amputation, the *Rebbe* sang the song (*Ezkerah*) – feeling no pain! The song has thirty-six stanzas, because it was a long surgery. He was concentrating so deeply on the song that he was unaware of anything else: thus, he did not feel any pain. How did he do it? It is all about concentration. We are not on the *Rebbe's modreigah*, level, to be able to shut our minds to excruciating pain. When it hurts – it hurts! What matters though is how much we allow ourselves to be affected by what takes place around us. Some of us retain memories of a sad experience for a lifetime. Others have the capability of shutting such things out of their mind. If we do not think about it, the pain will cease. Yes, we are capable of controlling what we think about and what we choose to remember. It is not easy, but it can be done. Song has the ability to either block or assuage unpleasant thoughts. It has that power.

The Modzitz manner of prayer worship incorporates melody with prayer to produce an ecstasy that is spiritually and physically uplifting. Once an individual experienced a *davening* in Modzitz, he was no longer the same person. He **felt** the words as he “lived” the prayer. Indeed, this is how one should *daven*. Song transports one to a different world, to a different mood. One has only to experience a *Kabbolas Shabbos* at any *Chassidic* center to understand the full meaning of song and music.

I conclude with one last story related by *Rav Yitzchak Hershkowitz*: *Reb Yehonasan Schwartz* is a noted singer at Jewish weddings. His *grammen* put words to song that reach the inner recesses of the soul, having an impact far beyond the wedding celebration. *Reb Yehonasan* also employs the power of song within the four walls of a hospital room. He and his good friend, *Reb Michoel Schnitzler* – another well-known singer – are often seen together in the hospital wards raising the patients’ spirits with their captivating melodies.

One day, the duo arrived at Sloan Kettering, a hospital noted for its treatment of patients suffering from dread diseases. As usual, they came to visit and in some way brighten the patients’ lives. As they were walking through the hall, someone stopped them and requested that they go to a certain room where an eighteen-year-old boy from Lakewood was a patient. He was suffering from a brain tumor, and the doctors had basically told the family that there was nothing more they could do. According to their assessment, it was a only matter of weeks before the teenager would succumb to the disease.

The two entered the room to see a young *yeshivah* student with tubes and drains coming out of him, his face swollen, his eyes filled with fear. They began their work. They sang *niggunim* and *grammen* and were even able to engage the patient, as he himself began to sing with them. After a short while, it was time to leave. Clearly, they had elevated the patient’s spirits. As they were walking out, *Reb Yehonasan*, not thinking of the ramification of his words, said, “*Im yirtzeh Hashem*, we will entertain him at his wedding.” As soon as the words exited his mouth, he realized the absurdity of his statement. The boy was no fool, and he commented, “Yes, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, in my next *gilgul*, reincarnation.” *Reb Yehonasan* felt terrible, but what could he do? He had spoken without thinking.

Two and a half years passed, and *Reb Yehonasan* received an invitation to a wedding in Lakewood taking place in four weeks. He looked at the names of the *chassan* and *kallah* and had no clue as to their identities – it must be a mistake. Yet, he was curious. Just in case it was for real, he would show his face and leave.

On the wedding night, he entered the *chasunah* hall to see the *chassan* sitting on a chair in the middle of a circle of friends and relatives. It was a very *Yeshivish* crowd and *Reb Yehonasan*, dressed in *chassidish* garb, felt totally out of place. He still had no idea why he was present. The invitation had clearly been a mistake. Suddenly, the *chassan* noticed him. He arose from his seat of honor and beckoned for *Reb Yehonasan* to join him. As *Reb Yehonasan* moved closer into the

circle, the *chassan* grabbed him and embraced him. He began to dance with a level of passion and fervor that *Reb* Yehonasan had not seen in a long time. Yet, *Reb* Yehonasan still had neither an idea who the *chassan* was, nor the reason he had been invited to the wedding.

Suddenly, the *chosson* looked deeply into his eyes and asked, “Do you not know who I am? I am the young man from Sloan-Kettering about whom you quipped, ‘We will entertain him at his wedding!’ I never forgot those words, and especially the songs you sang. They literally changed my frame of mind, delivering the hope and strength to fight the disease. So far, I am winning! Now you understand why I invited you to my wedding. **You** are the biggest *mechutan!*”