

## Take of the land's glory in your baggage. (43:11)

*Horav Nachman Breslover, zl*, explains *zimras ha'aretz* innovatively. *Zimras* is derived from *zemer*, song. Thus, Yaakov *Avinu* sent his sons to Egypt with a melody of *Eretz Yisrael* to be sung before the ruler who was causing them so much angst. A melody has a strong influence; a song has immense power and can elevate a person. When Yaakov wanted to send something along with his sons that would have powerful influence on the ruler, he sent a song. What is a Jewish song? (I refer here to traditional melodies handed down through the generations and *nuschaos*, versions of liturgical prayer.) For generations, we have created songs to express our deep-rooted love for Hashem, His Torah and *mitzvos*. Song enhances our lives and gives meaning and even endurance to what may seem to be an otherwise commonplace activity. Not everyone is on the level to imbibe the spirit of a spiritual activity without the accompaniment of a song/melody.

A song expresses emotion. It has the power to penetrate the external impediments that block spiritual inspiration from reaching deep into the soul. The emotional impression often has greater power than spoken words. Proof positive is the reactive expressions and enduring impression one feels and observes at a *kumsitz*.

When we pray to Hashem, we sing the words, some to standardized tunes, others to personal preferred melodies. Each *tefillah* has its own unique tune. *Shabbos*, *Yom Tov*, *Rosh Chodesh*, *Pesach seder*, all have tunes that *Klal Yisrael* has preserved throughout the generations. *Chassidic* courts and *yeshivos* have their specific renditions of songs. Jews who have sadly lost their connection with religious observance still remember the songs, because the songs penetrated their soul.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks relates that he once observed a teacher explaining to young children the difference between a physical possession and a spiritual one. He had them build a paper model of Yerushalayim. He then played a song about Yerushalayim on a recorder and taught the song to the children. At the end of the session, he did something that evoked astonishment. He tore up the model and shredded the tape of the song. He looked deeply into the eyes of the children and asked, "Do we still have the model?" They replied, "No." "Do we still have the song?" They replied a resounding, "Yes!" We may, over time and adversity, lose the physical possessions and edifices that have been so much a part of our lives. We have not, however, lost the spiritual, emotional inspirations.

On *Tishah B'Av* we sit on the ground as mourners and chant *Megillas Eichah* with its haunting tune, recite the inspiring *piyutim* that relate the cataclysmic tragedy that led up to and included *Churban Bais HaMikdash*. The songs of the day penetrate our souls. We no longer have the glory of the *Bais HaMikdash* in our lives. We still, however, have the song through which we mourn that we once had faith, and we can express hope that we will soon have faith again.

*Horav Moshe Tzvi Neriya, zl*, offers a practical reason for the song which Yaakov sent to Yosef. It

is the song of a father who has not given up on his son. He awaits his return, when they will unite together as they were before he disappeared. Yaakov felt that perhaps the viceroy would be moved by the song and introduce it to the Egyptian community. In a short time, everyone in the country would be singing it. Perhaps, his long-lost son would hear, and the emotions in his heart would be aroused to the point that he would return to his father.

The *Moditz Chassidic* dynasty is renowned for its legacy of song. *Horav Yisrael, zl, Moditzer Rebbe*, developed song as the dynasty's trademark. One of the *Rebbe's* relatives asked him why he was so enchanted with song and melodies. Surely, he had more conventional ways to serve Hashem. The *Rebbe* explained that the distinction of song is that it elevates the soul of man and brings his heart closer to Hashem. The relative wondered why so many great Torah leaders, brilliant educators, righteous men whose devotion to Hashem was without peer, employing all of their skills and making use of all the *sefarim* authored on the topics of *yiraas Shomayim* and *mussar*, fear of Heaven and ethical behavior, did not succeed. Yet, a song would accomplish what they failed to do.

The *Rebbe* explained with an anecdote. A villager who owned a mill which ground wheat, transforming it into flour, came to the city to purchase an alarm clock. He visited a jeweler who sold watches. His eye fell on a small, but sweet-sounding, alarm clock. The jeweler was happy to help, but being a sociable person, he asked the visitor from where he hailed and what his profession was. The man told him the name of his village and that he was a miller by vocation. "Which clock has found your fancy?" the jeweler asked. "I would like to purchase that (pointed to his choice) alarm clock" was his reply. The jeweler looked at the would- be customer incredulously, "For someone who listens all day to the loud grinding sounds of the millstones, do you think that a low alarm would have any effect?" "You live in the city," the villager countered. "As such, you do not understand. True, the sound of the grinding of the millstone is powerful, but I am used to it. I can even fall asleep to its loud, synchronized sound. This small alarm clock has a unique new sound, to which my ears are not accustomed. Its sweet, mellow tone will be a welcome wake-up call for me."

"Likewise," said the *Rebbe*, "all the *mussar sefarim* and volumes on *yiraas Shomayim* are commonplace. Every observant Jew possesses such *sefarim* as part of his library. He has heard and studied it all to the point that he is no longer sensitive to its message. A song is innovative and engaging, thus able to inspire where *sefarim* and lectures no longer succeed.

The following vignette is not about a song, but it very well could be. It shows how a child remembers certain practices that penetrate his/her soul and remains with him throughout the most challenging adversity. Indeed, throughout life. *Chief Rabbi Horav Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog, zl*, took it upon himself to rescue Jewish children whose parents had sent them away to monasteries to protect them from the Nazi hordes who were devastating the Jewish communities of Europe.

One day in 1946 (a year after liberation), the Chief Rabbi arrived at a large monastery which was known to have taken many Jewish children into their custody. The nuns cared for these children

with the goal of converting them to Catholicism. *Rav Herzog* appeared and demanded the release of these children. He turned to the Mother Superior who was in charge of the monastery and thanked her for saving the lives of these precious children. Now that the war was over, he expected to return them to their rightful Jewish homes. The nun was “happy” to acquiesce to his request, but she had one problem: In some instances, these children had been at the monastery for a few years, during which they had been inculcated and indoctrinated with Catholicism. How could he possibly discern who was Jewish?

*Rav Herzog* assured her that he would know. He asked her to gather all the children into a large hall, ascended the stage and cried out, *Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*; “Hear O *Yisrael*, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One.”

Immediately, dozens of children rushed to the stage shouting, “Mama! Papa!” as tears welled up in their eyes. Some of the children began to sob uncontrollably. While few of the children remembered much of their early lives, the sound of *Shema*, the seminal prayer of the Jewish faith, still ringing in their ears from their early years, instantly brought back memories of reciting these *pesukim* with their parents. For the most part, they no longer had their homes, but the sounds of home, the words of the *Shema*, was deeply imbued in their hearts. This was the connection that would not be severed.