

פרשת בשלח תש"ע

שיחות רב עוזר

Insights into Torah and Halacha from Rav Ozer Glickman שליט"א

ר"ם בישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

The Power of Song

יְמִינֶךָ יְ-הוָה נֶאֱדָרִי בְכֶם יְמִינֶךָ יְ-הוָה תִּרְעַץ אֹיֵב:

I had the privilege a few weeks ago of reconnecting after decades with my dearest friend growing up in Philadelphia, ידיד נפשי, Chazzan Hesh Weitz נ"י. Hesh, a Chabadnik for many years, introduced me to the Lubavitcher community in Northeast Philadelphia when we were in high school. I often joined Rabbi Aaron Popack ע"ה in his *shteibel* a few blocks from my home. It was my first contact with the selfless *tzidkus* of חב"ד and I cherish recollections of Rabbi Popack and his fine family. Northeast Philadelphia was the home of many prominent figures in the Lubavitcher movement including שליט"א Rabbi Abraham Shemtov יבלח"ט and שליט"א Rabbi David Krasnjanski. Their kindness toward my family, especially my late mother ע"ה, has left behind a warmth in my heart toward חב"ד that will likely never cool.

What I remember best are the *niggunim*. It was the interplay of words and music that moved me. I could never deeply relate to the *niggunim* without words. In the end, I remain a *misnagged* (my definition: a Jew for whom כיצד מרקדין לפני הכלה is primarily a סוויגא, not a song).

My favorite *niggunim* started slow, plaintively, simple tuneful melodies. Most of the men around the table were elderly. Hesh and I were, other than Rabbi Popack and occasionally his son Mendel home from Crown Heights, the only singers under sixty. I was self-conscious at first, a teenager afraid to betray emotion in a public place. The melody would build and we would gradually lose ourselves in the fervor I saw in Hesh's face and he in mine. It was an experience I could never capture in my own home alone. שירה is a group activity.

עם ישראל and משה רבנו describes how מכילתא is no exception. The שירת הים the song at the sea:

ר' אליעזר בן תדאי אומר: משה היה פותח בדברים תחלה, וישראל עונין אחריו וגומרין עמו. משה היה פותח ואומר: "אשירה לה'" וישראל עונין אחריו וגומרין עמו: "אשירה לה' כי גאה גאה."

R. Eliezer ben Tedai said: Moshe began and Israel responded, completing together with him. Moshe began and said: "I will sing to Ha-Shem" and Israel responded and completed with him: "I will sing to Ha-Shem for He is greatly exalted."

The שליח הציבור, as it were, recites the first words and the קהילה, the entire people of Israel, repeat them and they finish the verse together. If we read the text carefully, we can see the power of the שירה on the assemblage. At first, משה רבנו and עם ישראל sing describing the events that have just occurred. They are somewhat detached from the moment, looking on like outsiders who have just witnessed the drama of the sea and its devastating force on the army of פרעה:

אֲשִׁירָה לַי-הוָה כִּי-גָאָה גָאָה סוּס וְרִכְבּוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם:

They sing of the events in the third person, objective observers of the scene before them, not yet in the moment, dependent on their leader to prompt them as he describes his intention to sing. God has overturned the rider and cast him into the sea. This they observed with their own eyes and their song describes the events in the third person.

As the שירה builds, we sense their התלהבות as they sing of the ישם יד they have just witnessed. At the height of their rapture, elevated to בגואל המושיע, they sense the immanence of הקב"ה and address Him directly:

יְמִינֶךָ יְ-הוָה נִאֲדָרִי בְכֶם יְמִינֶךָ יְ-הוָה תִּרְעַץ אֹיְבֶיךָ:

Your Hand, HaShem, is gloriously powerful; Your Hand, HaShem, smashes the enemy.

The greatest of the נביאים leads the people in שירה, a song so powerful that it inspires even the lowest of them to נבואה. In the words of the מכילתא:

ראתה שפחה על הים מה שלא ראה יחזקאל בן בוזי

A housemaid saw by the sea what Yechezkel ben Buzi never saw.

Even the humblest were raised to a level that far surpassed the visionary who glimpsed the מעשה המרכבה, the esoteric mysteries of God's essence. Such is the power of שירה.

Because שירה breeds intimacy with הקב"ה, it cannot be attained on command. We need the inspiration of wondrous events to bring us into the moment. The ר"ן cites a תשובה of רב האי גאון that reflects this notion in a halakhic context. We do not, the גאון decides, recite a ברכה over הלל since we do not recite it as a mandated act of קריאה but as a natural response of שירה to the wonders we are re-enacting. One recites ברכת המצות over imperatives, whether they be compelled by the authority of the Torah or the Rabbis.

The מרדכי cites the גאונים somewhat differently but which reinforces our analysis. Writing in the name of the גאונים and mentioning רב האי גאון specifically, the מרדכי explains that הלל at the סדר is not preceded by ברכת המצות because we break it up into two parts, a sign that we are only בעלמא קוראים, implying not מצוה מצוה. The חידושי recasts the חילוק מ'מרדכי as a demonstration that there are two types of הלל: one as קריאה and the other as שירה.

Both are necessary. We live our lives in the calmer interstices between the peaks of emotion that occur on joyous (and sad) occasions. The miraculous aspects of our history cannot keep us in a perpetual state of rapture even as they provide the sacred context that makes our existence meaningful. Without קריאה, there is no structure; without שירה, there is no passion. קריאה informs; שירה elevates. A Jew needs both.

שבת שלום

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