

Parshat Ha'azinu, Rabbi David Mahler

A few years back, the NY Times ran an obituary for Dr. Oliver Sacks, one of the world's greatest and most respected Neurologists. He was an author – a brilliant man. He was the inspiration for the early '90's movie, *Awakenings*, starring Robin Williams and Robert De Niro. The obituary made mention of one of his books, *Musicophilia, Tales of Music and the Brain*. Sacks examines the extreme effects of music on the human brain and how lives can be utterly transformed by the simplest of harmonies. He concludes that humans are truly a “Musical Species”.

Parshat Beshalach, which contains the *Shirat HaYam* (song of the sea – *Az Yashir*) is referred to as *Shabbat Shira*. This *Shabbat* is not the *Shabbat Shira*, yet it is most definitely still a *shabbat* of *Shira*. At the end of last week's *parsha*, *Hashem* commanded *Moshe Rabbeinu*, “*Kitvu Lachem et HaShira Hazot*” – Write for you this song”. What song was Moshe commanded to write down?

This was a disagreement amongst the Rabbis.

According to the *Gemara*, the song in the *pasuk* is the *Torah* – a charge for all people to write their own *Sefer Torah*.

However, both *Rashi* and the *Ramban* view the song in the *pasuk* as our *parsha* of *Ha'azinu* which is written in poetic verse – as a song.

But according to the first view – that of the *Gemara* – the *Torah* refers to itself as a song. What's the comparison? Why is the *Torah* referred to as a song?

Many beautiful comparisons are suggested, however, Rav Yitzchak Herzog, former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel (1936-1959), Rav Kook's successor, suggested that in virtually all fields of study, a person

who is unlearned in that discipline does not derive any pleasure from hearing a theory or an insight concerning that field of study.

Take physics, for example: A physicist will derive great pleasure from hearing a "*chiddush*" in his field of expertise as will a heart surgeon, a computer programmer or even a plumber. However, someone who has never studied and never been interested in physics, cardiology, programming or plumbing will be totally unmoved by the very same insight.

The same applies to many, many other disciplines.

However, this is not the case with music. When Beethoven's 5th Symphony is played -- regardless of whether one is a concert master or a plain simple person - there is something one can get out of it. Music is something that everyone on his or her own level can enjoy. Everyone can relate to music. Humans are musical species. In some way we can all relate, gain from and be touched, on some level, by the Beatles and the Maccabeats, Garth Brooks and Avraham Fried, Adam Levine and Baruch Levine, Helfgott's *Kol Ndre* and of course, Mahler's 9th.

Rav Herzog says that this is why the Torah is called "*Shirah*". Torah, at every level can inspire and transform.

There are no leveled readers in *Torah*. After *Simchat Torah*, every Jew will sit on *Shabbat* and learn *Parshat Bereishit* – a 2nd grader, a college student as well as the *Gedolim* and *Chachamim* will be studying the same *pesukim*. Each will glean insights on their own level – but they will be studying the same text.

That's the beauty of the *Torah* – it's like a song.

Furthermore, when so many study at various levels - each person delving into the text at his or her own level and pace, the learning creates a symphony of sorts. The baritones, tenors and sopranos all work in

tandem to create a glorious product. The harmonizing between the different voices becomes a powerfully moving experience. The more varied voices, the more beautiful the music sounds.

Lastly, the *Torah* is compared to a song because songs are usually enjoyable to listen to and enjoy. That's why writing a *Torah* is the *Torah's* final *mitzvah*, #613, because living a life of *Torah* should always be fun, enjoyable and rewarding.

May we all be blessed with a year of true enjoyment and *simcha* in our learning of *Torah*, and may it be a year where our *Talmud Torah* transforms us to be more sensitive, caring and inspired.

Shabbat Shalom!