



mission that he was sent to perform. “*V’Nishma Kolo*” The sound of the bells, their voice, must be heard by those outside.

Others understand the sound of the bells to be focused on the One to whom the priest is approaching. One doesn’t “barge in on God” - as it were - we announce our presence and announce our taking-leave through the music of the bells. *V’Nishma Kolo*

These two interpretations can be understood as reflections on the role of music in *Avodat Hashem* - religious life. The sound of the bells connects the *kohen* to the broader community standing outside the curtain. This interpretation highlights the ability of music to connect people to each other and build community. Alternatively - and at the same time - the sound of the bells can be meant to be heard by God as they announce the *kohen’s* entrance. This interpretation highlights the way that music can prepare a path towards intimacy with God.

My father, whose *jaarzeit* - the anniversary of his death - is today - did not grow up singing American folk music. My father came to America in March of 1949 and was raised in a devout Orthodox home, albeit one with a European appreciation for culture. As a student at Rabbi Jacob Joseph Yeshiva my father excelled as a Talmud student, and taught his classmates - mostly American kids from the Lower East Side- that Beethoven’s 9th symphony was “the greatest music ever written.” Which is true.

Although he had been no longer religious for decades by the time that I was born, the massive tomes of the Talmud on display on my father’s bookcase set our home apart from every other home I knew and were a constant reminder of my father’s background. “Did you know, David,” my father once asked me, “that there is an entire book here, all about eggs?” Of course, the Talmudic tractate *Beitzab* is about a great deal more than just eggs. But that was as symbol of foreignness of the esoteric knowledge contained in those ancient books.

In elementary school, I entertained my friends with tales about my Orthodox grandmother who had different dishes for dairy and meat and who didn’t switch electric lights on all Saturday - nobody among my friends had heard of anything so outlandish.

I fell in love with Shabbat as a 13 year old and refraining from *melachah* - creative endeavors - for 25 hours no longer seemed outlandish to me. After a year of saying kaddish as a 15 year old, the weekday, Shabbat, and holiday, *siddur* was no longer obscure. In yeshiva for the first time after high-school, the Jewish library was opened to me.

*Massechet Beitzab* is no longer just a book with a funny name. It’s a crucial guide for how I live my life and for how all of us commemorate and celebrate the Jewish holidays. In honor of my father’s *jaarzeit*, I want to

share something from *Massechet Beitzab* that has great halakhic importance, and also speaks to the theme of music as a tool in *avodat hashem*.

The Talmud tells us, on page 36b, that we don't clap, stomp, or dance on Shabbat or yom tov, lest we come to violate Shabbat in a more severe way by repairing musical instruments. And, based on *Massechet Beitzab* - the book about eggs - the most influential code of Jewish Law, the *Shulchan Arukh*, concludes that any sound that emerges from a musical instrument is forbidden on Shabbat or on yom tov.

The *Tosafot*, writing in Northern Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries, were aware that a restrictive position against playing instruments could coincide with relaxed standards for clapping, stomping, and even dancing. This shows us that, as Jewish law developed, Shabbat became a day that was filled with song, with music, with clapping, and even dancing - but not instrumental music.

Does the absence of instruments limit the spiritual possibilities of the day? No. But it does create a challenge to sing louder and to sing stronger.

The kohen's service in the mishkan and in the temple had a soundtrack. The ringing of golden bells let all who were gathered and waiting outside know that the kohen was representing them and was busy in the device of God. And the ringing of those golden bells, let God know - as it were - that the kohen, and the nation he represented, was seeking intimacy with God.

Our Shabbat also needs to have a soundtrack. Without an instrument to listen to and organize our singing, each of us has a need to use our voices, without self-consciousness, with the earnest sincerity of a folk-singer and the spiritual ambition of a Hassid, to create our own Shabbat soundtrack.

We don't have bells. But we do have songs to sing. We can sing them in the morning, we can sing them in the evening, at the Shabbat table, and at shul. They are songs of love between our brothers and sisters. And they are songs of love between humanity and God.

Shabbat Shalom.