

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel tov to Ari and Inbal Elman on Daniel's Bar Mitzva this morning. Mazel Tov to Daniel's grandparents, Michael and Linda Elman, and Tuvia and Adi Eiger. May you have much continued *nachas* from Daniel and all your children and grandchildren.

Thank you to the drasha sponsors:

- Yehuda and Geoula Cahn, in memory of Yehuda's mother, Shirley Cahn, a'h, whose *yahrzeit* is the 13th of Tishrei.
- Jane and Morris Mayer, in commemoration of the first *yahrzeit* of Morris's father, Harry Mayer, Avraham Tzvi ben Moshe Zecharia HaLevi, z"l, on the 13th of Tishrei.

May the neshamos have an aliya and may the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha* and good health.

I want to begin by thanking everyone who was a part of the magnificent *Yamim Noraim* experience here in Shomrei. The Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur *tefillos* were beautiful and extremely uplifting and meaningful. The *achdus*, the feeling of connection, and the intensity were palpable, and very moving and inspiring.

I especially want to thank our excellent Baalei Tefilla, Baalei Kria, and Baalei Tekiah, and our very dedicated Gabboim, as well as our President, Executive Board and Executive Director, and those responsible for the seating, the Yizkor book, and *Kol Hashomrim*, and the many other volunteers. Things ran so smoothly because of all their hard work and dedication. May we all be *zoche* to a year of continued *siyata dishmaya*, growth and celebration, and inspiration, together.

As we discussed during Elul, the **Shel" a Hakadosh** writes that the Parshios we read are designed to teach us insights, specifically geared to that time of the year. Following that line of reasoning, it seems that Parshas Ha'azinu, which we read this morning, is perfectly timed, to be read right after Yom Kippur, as we look forward to Sukkos.

For 40 days, beginning with Rosh Chodesh Elul, we climbed to the peak of spirituality--Neilah. And now we await the next Yom Tov. It presents us an opportunity to take the newly discovered life lessons and demonstrate them...in *Mitzvas Sukka*, by changing the way we live to reflect our new appreciation for life. We are told to take the *daled minim* ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון reflect our appreciation...for life.

מדרש אגדה (בבובר) ויקרא פרשת אמור פרק כג

ד"א ולקחתם לכם. לפי שמראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים כל העולם נידון, וביום הכיפורים נחתם גזר דינם, וכיון שישאל יוצאים לשלום מאלו הימים, מנענעין את לולביהן, והלולב דומה לשדרה של אדם, והדס דומה לעין האדם, ערבה דומה לפה, אתרוג דומה ללב, אלו ארבעה אברים שבגוף שאין באדם גדול מהם:

The **Medrash** says that we begin to live again—on Sukkos. We were judged, we have been given new life...and the *daled minim* represents our body's parts—spine, eye, mouth, and heart. Shaking them represents shaking ourselves—with the realization and appreciation--that we are still alive!

But how do we make sure we hold onto those elevated feelings?

Parshas Haazinu guides us. Consider the context. Moshe had led the people for more than 40 years. Before leaving the people, he had spoken to them. He had reviewed their history and revealed their destiny. He had explained the laws that would make theirs a unique society of people bound in a covenant with one another and with God. He renewed their covenant with Hashem, and then handed over leadership to his disciple and successor, Yeshoshua. In his final

act, he blessed the people, tribe by tribe. But before that, there was one more thing he had to do. He had to sum up his prophetic message in a way the people would always remember and be inspired by.

Moshe taught them a שירה , שירת האזינו , which conveys the idea of both a poem and a song.

What is a poem? **Robert Frost** said “*One could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost ... in translation.*”¹

Poetry has tremendous power to convey an idea with a depth of emotion that regular words cannot capture.

And what a song? There is something profoundly spiritual about music. When language aspires to the transcendent, it expresses itself in song.

Chazal enumerated ten שירות at key moments in the life of the Jewish nation. The first is by Adam HaRishon, who sang *mizmor shir leyom haShabbos*. Next was *Az Yashir*, the song of the Jews at the Red Sea, as they left Mitzrayim. The third was sung when they received the *B'er*, the ever-flowing well that accompanied them in the desert. The fourth is in this morning's *parasha*-Moshe's song of Haazinu at the end of his life. The next five were by Yeshoshua, Devora, Chana, King David, and Shlomo Hamelech. Rabbi Akiva said, “All songs are holy but Shlomo's *Shir ha-Shirim*, the Song of Songs, is the holy of holies.” The tenth song has not yet been sung. It will be the song of the Mashiach.

The **Leviim** sang every day in the *Beis Hamikdash*, and songs are part of our lives, every day.

Each morning, we begin our davening with *pesukei de-zimra*. These include מזמור לתודה with the moving words בשמחה, עבדו את ה' בשמחה, “serve Hashem with joy,” which the **Shulchan Aruch** (51:9) says must be sung

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות ברכות השחר ושאר ברכות סימן נא סעיף ט
(ט) י מזמור לתודה (תהילים ק, א - ה) יש לאומרה בנגינה,

The *pesukei de-zimra*, magnificently build up to Tehillim 150, in which instruments and the human voice and the entire human body combine to sing God's praises.

תהלים פרק קנ פסוק א - ו

(א) תללו יהוה הללו אל בקדשו תללוהו ברקיע עזו: (ב) תללוהו בגבורתו תללוהו כרב גדלו: (ג) תללוהו בתקיע שופר
תללוהו בגבול וכנור: (ד) תללוהו בתוף ומחול תללוהו במגים ועוגב: (ה) תללוהו בצלצלי שמע תללוהו בצלצלי תרועה:
(ו) כל הנשמה תהלל ליה תללוהו:

Chazal are teaching us that, when we daven, we are not simply to read the words: rather, we are to sing them. According to our tradition, there are different tunes for different *tefillos*. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, *Shabbos*, the *Shalosh Regalim*, *Pesach*, *Shavuos*, *Sukkos*, and the *Yamim Noraim*--*Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

Moreover, there are different tunes for the different texts we read and study. There is one kind of *trop*, cantillation, for the Torah, another for the *haftorah* from the prophetic books, and yet another for the *Megillos*.

¹ Robert Frost, *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry* (1959). The complete quote is: “I could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation.

The Gemara teaches (מגילה ל"ב, ביצה כ"ד) that there was a particular tune for Mishna, and the **Tiferes Yisroel** says that the specific words chosen by Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi were meant to fit the tune. This explains the phrase חסורי מהסרא והכי קתני. The text is incomplete—meaning more explanation is necessary, but Rebbi was limited by the tune, rhythm, and meter.

Traditionally, there is a *niggun* for Gemara, which was captured beautifully by **Chaim Nachman Bialik** in his moving poem “Hamasmid,” with the refrain *הוי הוי אמר אביי הוי אמר רבא*. Think about the fact that we can come into shul blindfolded and by the music alone tell what kind of day it is and what kind of text is being read. Jewish texts are music-coded.

This is because music has extraordinary power to **evoke emotion**. The Kol Nidrei with which Yom Kippur begins is a great example. It is not really a prayer at all. Instead, it is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. There can be little doubt that its ancient, haunting melody has given it such a hold over the Jewish imagination. It is hard to hear those notes and not feel that you are in the presence of God on the Day of Judgment, that you are standing in the company of Jews of all places and times as they plead with Heaven for forgiveness. It is the holy of holies of the Jewish soul. On Tisha B’Av, you can’t read *Eicha*, the Book of Lamentations, with its own unique cantillation, and not feel the tears of Jews through the ages as they suffered for their faith and wept as they remembered what they had lost, the pain as fresh as it was the day the Temple was destroyed. Words without music are like a body without a soul.

This is because, as **Rav Hirsch** comments on **Breishis 4:21**: “*Music expresses neither images nor concepts, but only moods and feelings*”

And it is easier to remember an experience than a piece of information. Songs stay with us.

The truth is that the entire Torah is called a שירה, a poem and song:

ולמדה בני ישראל שירה בפיהם למען תהיה לי השירה הזאת לעד בבני ישראל

Chazal understand this *pasuk* to be referring to the last *Mitzva*—to write a *sefer Torah*...

The **Netziv** has a long essay in the introduction to his *perush*, *Haamek Davar*, where he expounds on the idea that the Torah is called a *shirah*. He explains that, to convey His message, Hashem employed tools similar to poetry—capturing a richness and depth that is lost in translation, and requires the Torah *she-ba’al peh*, the oral tradition, to understand it.

The beautiful words of **T.S. Elliot** come to mind: “*Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.*”

I believe that is why Chazal teach that when the Torah was translated into Greek and presented without the Hebrew words, on ח' טבת, the Rabbis described three days of darkness descending upon the world and decreed a fast, which we still commemorate as part of עשרה בטבת... They saw that translating the Torah separated it from its purity and stripped it of its depth and its poetic nature. A translation cannot truly capture its essence.

Torah is compared to a song in other ways, as well. **Rav Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi Herzog**, the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, says that just as everyone at any age can appreciate a good piece of music, so too everyone at any age can appreciate the Torah.

This is an idea **Rav Soloveitchik** expressed in his *haggada*.

ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו ישראל... כנגד ארבעה בנים דיברה תורה

The Torah has something to say to everyone, every stage of life, every experience...

But fundamentally, Torah is a song, because of the necessity to pass it down from generation to generation. **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** explains this in context of the *pasuk* תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב , that Torah is called a *Morasha*.

Hebrew has two words for an inheritance, a legacy: nachalah and morashah. They convey different ideas. Nachalah is related to the word nachal, meaning a river, a stream. As water, naturally and without any human intervention, flows downhill, so an inheritance flows down the generations. It happens naturally. It needs no effort on our part.

*A morashah is different. It means to take possession of something by a positive deed or effort. Torah is a morashah, not a nachalah. It requires action. We need to write it for ourselves, not merely inherit it from our ancestors. And this adds a new dimension to why we call the Torah a song. **Because if we are to hand down our faith and way of life to the next generation, it must sing. Torah must be affecting, not just cognitive. It must speak to our emotions.***

But there is one more idea in a song that is relevant to Torah. The **Aruch HaShulchan** uses the metaphor of Torah as a song to present the idea of Torah's diversity: "In every [Torah] debate – whether between *Tannaim*, *Amoraim*, *Geonim*, or *Poskim* – in truth, one who properly understands [will see] that they are the words of the Living God, and all of them reflect some aspect of halachah. On the contrary, this is the glory of our holy and pure Torah. The entire Torah is called "shirah," and the glory of a song is expressed when the kolos (voices or sounds) are different from each other – the beauty of it is in [the harmony]."

The Torah is God's שירה , and we, the Jewish people, are His choir. Collectively, we are told to sing His song. We are the performers of His choral symphony.

As we bridge the gap between the *Yamim Noraim* and *Sukkos*, let us make sure to sing... כל...to express the emotion and connection we developed over the *Yamim Noraim*, to hold onto it...every day...and may we merit to sing together in a rebuilt Yerushalayim in the שמחת בית השואבה, as the Leviim sing their holy songs...with all of Klal Yisrael in attendance...amen.