

CHAPTER NINETY-SIX

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

The *shul* is packed; it is *Ne'ila*. The sun is setting and there is an atmosphere of spirituality that has been building up the entire day. The Rav ascends to the *amud*, clears his throat, and with a tearful moan, starts to recite the final stanzas of *Avinu Malkeinu*. Everyone begins to daven louder; any listener will be able to discern the passionate yearning. The Rav's cries tear open the hearts, and soon all are caught up with this last minute appeal for mercy. On and on it goes; each stanza becomes its own book of need. Finally the Rav comes to the last stanza, the sobs are uncontrollable; words are no longer available, so, almost in a whisper, he starts to sing a *niggun*. Soon the entire congregation is singing with him, the tears and moans becoming background chorus to this new and vivid mosaic.

The reader will think that we speak here of a community of devote *heimeshe Yidden* who are dressed in their white *kittelach* and are steeped in *kedusha* and *Torah* throughout the year. But no, the congregation we have depicted here is a mixed bunch. Many are not yet Shabbos observant, others first learning the basic rudiments of a Torah lifestyle. Some have come to shul for the first time in a year, yes a mixed crowd indeed. Yet, they have become galvanized by the cries of our ancient *tefilllos*, and even more, by the haunting tune they have heard. A few will sing it for the first time, others are old hands, but for this defining moment all are one, *Klal Yisrael* lives within them all.

You cannot understand it until you have lived it, and even then it is impossible to explain. You can take any group of *Yidden*, put them together, and if you start a real *niggun*, you can bring them to the highest points of spirituality. They need not know how to learn, in fact, they may be totally non observant, but give them the right song, and you can break down all the walls of separation. I defy anyone to explain how this all works, it has to do with the neshama and therefore is beyond mere words. Music has the power to make you aware of your most inner needs, and at the same time bonds you with others who are singing the same tune.

This dynamic is not new to me, but every time I witness it I become even more inspired. The realm of *niggun* is well beyond human understanding. *Chazal* tell us that it can be found neighboring the realm of teshuva. Why? Because more than anything else, the spirituality that a *niggun* contains, can move one closer to true repentance.

In these dark times it could well be that it will take a special new *niggun* to lift us above and beyond the pain we see about us. Today, despite all the affluence we share, there are many who are full of anger and hurt. They feel the walls closing in on themselves, with no place for light or safety. Such

neshamos crave a new song, a fresh *niggun* that will inspire them towards personal hope. On the wider scale, when each day carries with it real fears for Jewish safety, where our enemies are indiscriminate in their hateful acts, perhaps a *niggun* or two will give our brethren the wherewithal to face what must be faced with new bravery.

Words lose their meaning, for they are spoken so often that they become tired and blasé. However, songs, they are fresh every time they are sung, each rendition complete with a new sense of meaning. You can *krechtz* each time, emphasizing a different phrase, thus changing the whole thrust of what you are feeling. Songs are the stuff of your soul, and speak to it as only they can.

This *kapital* tells of songs, songs for the future and songs for now. It was written by *Moshe Rabbeinu*, and *Chazal* discuss who it was dedicated to. Interestingly, we understand that no matter to whom Moshe dedicated this to, *David Hamelech* used it for his own circumstances. We are told that David sang it upon bringing the Holy Ark from the house of *Oved Edom*. From this we can see that these words touch on the hopes of all future redemptions, both private and as a people. Yes, perhaps because its theme is song, its dedication must remain enveloped in mystery, as is its subject matter.

SHIRU LAHASHEM SHIR CHADASH ... "Sing to Hashem a new song, sing to Hashem all the inhabitants of earth."

When you sing a *niggun* to Hashem, it is always new, always full with the current needs that you carry with you. When the final redemption comes, every human will become aware of Hashem, and His Greatness, then all will sing, and that will surely be a new song. However, as we await that great day, we should never stop singing, filling our hearts with Hashem's love.

SHIRU LAHASHEM BARCHU SHEMA ... "Sing to Hashem, bless His name, proclaim His deliverance from day to day."

Reb Yosef Friedenson, editor of *Dos Yiddishe Vort*, tells the story of how he and a group of friends were in a metal shop in that slave labor camp named, the Herman Goering works. The day was *Shemini Atzeres* and though they were living in constant fear for their lives, they still sought to celebrate the day in some way. Before they received their daily orders from the overseer, a man named Pape, they found a few moments free, and so, they broke out with the spirited holiday song, *Ein adir kaHashem, ein baruch keben Amram* "There is none as powerful as Hashem, nor blessed as Moshe, the son of *Amram*." Pape was shocked. Despite the torture, the humiliation, and the endless sense of loss that was their daily existence, these Jews were singing!

"Why do you sing?" he asked in bewilderment, "Do you have it so good that you can sing?"

The group explained the words of the song, going through each stanza, including those that read, "There are no wise men like the scholars of the Torah, and there is no redeemer like Hashem." Pape was astonished. "After all the torture that you have been through, do you still believe this?" Immediately one of the younger members of the group jumped up and cried out, "Yes!" This

particular lad wasn't particularly known for his religiosity, yet his voice was emphatic. Immediately others joined him with their endorsement. Pape was astonished; he shook his head and was heard to say, "I don't know how the Fuhrer will ever get rid of you!"

Yidden are holy, they sing, and their song comes from the heart!

KI GADOL HASHEM ... "For Hashem is great and most extolled; He is awesome above all gods."

When we sing to Hashem and of His greatness, then nothing, nothing in this entire world can come between our hearts and His essence.

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