

WELL-BREAD JEWS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

And then Moshe sang and the Children of Israel this song to G-d. (Shemos 15:1)

When it comes to music, my children and I don't see eye-to-eye these days. They are enamored by the music they hear on the radio that we, quite frankly, can't stand. Oh well, kids will be kids.

I've gotten into heated "debates" before with people who have held that even "Rock 'n Roll" and "Jazz" can be considered holy (if you know who to listen to and how to listen to it). And, classical music lovers often point out the "godliness" of their musical venue, which is often written and conducted with mathematical precision.

If you want to know what kind of music you listen to and favor, there is a simple test. Check yourself, or more precisely, check your body, and ask yourself, what does this music make my body feel like doing?

If the music makes you feel like satisfying some primordial urge and compromise your godly dignity, then it is "body music," that is, music aimed at satisfying instinctual tendencies. If the music inspires you to act in a dignified manor, though, not necessarily in a spiritual manner, then, more than likely, it is music for the brain, or, cerebral music.

However, if the music you sing or enjoy tends to make you desire more spirituality, or, more directly, to serve G-d better, then it is "Soul-Music" -- in the true sense of the term. Or, more accurately, it is "Shirah," like that which Moshe and the Jewish people sang when they witnessed the fantastically-awesome redemption of the fleeing Jewish nation from the clutches of the wicked and angry Egyptian army.

In some cases, music is called a "window" to the soul. In the case of Shirah, it is the song of the soul itself.

The climax of this Shirah, called "Shir Shel Yumm" ("Song of the Sea") is the climax of all shirah:

"This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him!" (Shemos 15:2)

THIS IS MY G-D: In His Glory He was revealed to them, and they were able to point at Him; a

handmaid saw what even the prophets never saw. (Rashi)

This is why the posuk begins:

AND THEN MOSHE SANG: When he saw the miracle, his heart desired to sing this song. (Rashi)

In other words, quite suddenly, as a burst of inspiration to both praise G-d and record the event and the emotions for posterity -- as if his soul jumped out of him in song. Which it did, for, great miracles tend to neutralize the body and quell its instinctual desires, which cannot be said for other forms of music. Great miracles make a believer even out of the body, at which time it willingly hands over the reigns of leadership to the soul.

The Talmud provides an interesting proof for this idea by stating that even nursing children said, "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him!" and even the fetuses from the womb sang Shirah as well (Sotah 30b). Now, one could ask, how can that be? How can children who cannot speak sing Shirah to G-d and says such holy words?

For, unlike a body, a soul has no age, being eternal. It is always aware, though unable to always expresses that awareness in the physical world due to the body's physical limitations. However, at the Red Sea, the miracle of the splitting sea and the resulting high-level revelation completely neutralized the bodies so that the souls could completely take over. The body's had no choice but to rise to the occasion and meet the demands of the soul to say Shirah to The Holy One, Blessed is He.

Shabbos Day:

G-d told Moshe, "I will rain bread from heaven for you. The people will go out and collect it, a specific amount every day, which will test them to see if they will live by My law or not." (Shemos 16:4)

This is the fourth week of "SHOVaVYM" -- the set of six parshios of Shemos through Mishpatim. It is supposed to be a special time of light, which increases and continues to increase, reaching a climax on Seder Night. This, of course, always mean a time of special spiritual opportunities, to counteract the effects of Amalek.

We are introduced this week to the people of Amalek. They are called "Reishis Goyim," which means the "First of the Nations," because they have the awful distinction of being the first nation to dare to attack the Jewish people as they left Egypt. They took a beating for it, but they also left a dreadful impression of the psyche of the Jewish people that affects us to this very day.

Amalek, as we have pointed out on so many occasions, represents spiritual doubt, a lack of clarity about what matters most in life, and, how to apply our energies. This is why, the rabbis point out, the numerical value of "amalek" is equal to the Hebrew word for "doubt" (sufek), and why his name can

be divided into two parts: ayin-malak (mem-lamed-kuf), which means "severed eye," as in, a severed "mind's eye."

The anti-thesis of Amalek was the manna, the special bread that fell from Heaven, also for the first time in this week's parshah, right before the attack of Amalek. If Amalek's "thesis" is spiritual doubt, then the manna must represent just the opposite, spiritual clarity.

Of course it does. Wouldn't YOU believe in G-d and His benevolence if YOUR food came down from Heaven everyday, enough for all members of the family? Wouldn't YOU be one of the G-d's strongest supporters if YOUR parnassah (livelihood) arrived at your front door daily, just like it did for the Jews in the desert?

Let me tell you a story that is not so unusual.

I know someone who, at age twenty or so, was "Chozar b'Teshuvah." Recognizing the need to catch up on years of Torah learning in a short period of time, he went to yeshivah in Eretz Yisroel, putting his career plans on hold. It was a bold move, and, he met with resistance from friends and family, but he did what he had to do.

His father, being the concerned, but supportive type, gave him a monthly stipend, for which his son was very grateful. And, even though the father had meant to support his son for only one year, it continued right into his marriage about four years later. The father's support allowed the son to only have to work part-time, and spend the rest of the time learning.

After the first year of marriage, the father told the son that the funding would have to stop, and, that he would have to pursue full-time work and perhaps return to America where his chances of financial success were greater. The son declined, and his father asked him, "How will you survive?" The son answered,

"You know, Dad, G-d has many messengers. Until now, you were the one through whom G-d took care of me and provided me with my needs, which, of course is wonderful, for, it means that we both share in the results of my Torah learning. You will always have a portion in the good that I do, but, with all due respect (and he meant it), G-d has many messengers. Just as He took care of me through you, He will provide for me through another means as well. I am grateful for what you have always done for me, and understand your need to cut back."

His father was skeptical, but, just as his father withdrew his financial support, a new opportunity came along that provided the missing income, and allowed my friend to stay in the world of Torah. And, when, a few years later that "well" dried up, another one came along to replace it, and, that person remains in the world of Torah to this very day. Monetarily, they are not rich, but, they live a good life by Torah standards, and they are grateful to remain in the Torah world, in whatever capacity they can.

You see, the point of the manna was not that it came for free, and not the certainty of its arrival,

otherwise, where in lay the test? No, just the contrary, the "gift" of manna was not in its certainty, but in its uncertainty, as we will show in the next d'var Torah.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Moshe told them, "This is the bread that G-d has given to you for food. This is what G-d has commanded: Every man should collect according to what he eats, an omer for every person in his household." (Shemos 16:16)

The Talmud, in a discussion about the manna, includes the following:

The students of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked him: Why did the manna not fall once a year (as opposed to once a day)? He replied, I shall give you a parable: It can be compared to a mortal king who had a son for whom he provided food once a year; (as a result) he saw his son once a year. Thereupon he provided for his maintenance daily, so that he called on him every day. The same (is the case) with Israel. One who had four or five children would worry and say, "Perhaps no manna will come down tomorrow, and all will die of hunger." Thus they turned their faces to heaven (in prayer). (Yoma 76a)

Manna meant insecurity. On one hand, it was nice to get food for free; on the other hand, in such situations, you're dependent upon the giver. The nice thing about "earning a living" is that you go to work, put in your time, and obligate your employer to pay you. At the end of the day, it is like money in the bank, though it may take two weeks to actually receive the paycheck.

Though how you behaved spiritually affected how the manna came for you, in the end, it came for free. Not that anything we do ever obligates G-d, but certainly doing nothing obligated G-d even less. G-d wanted it that way, because, in truth, that is the way it always is, for, as the following possukim teach, the lesson of the manna is an eternal one:

Remember the way G-d, your G-d, led you for these forty years in the desert in order to test you, to see what you really thought, and whether you would keep His commandments or not. He afflicted you, and caused you to go hungry, and gave you manna to eat which you did not recognize, nor did your ancestors experience it -- so that He could teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but by whatever G-d says should exist does man live. (Devarim 8:2-3)

That didn't apply only in the desert; it applies at all times. The only difference between the desert and all the years since then is how many veils and how many messengers G-d uses to "hide" His involvement in our parnassah. However, no messenger delivers a thing until the command to do so emanates out of the mouth of G-d, so-to-speak. The only questions are, who will have the merit to be the deliverer of G-d's brochah, and, will the recipient will make the mistake of thinking that his financial success is the result of his efforts, and not a gift from G-d.

This is the test that we must pass, for, if we don't, then Amalek is the result. This is why much later on in Parashas Ki Seitzei, when we recall Amalek's attack on the Jewish people in this week's parshah, it follows the section about keeping fair weights and dealing justly in the market place. Obsession with parnassah and materialism usually reduces one's ability to properly relate to G-d, and often forces many people to look for reasons to doubt G-d's existence or His involvement in the affairs of man.

Subjugation to Amalek the concept usually leads to subjugation to Amalek the people, whatever nationality they may represent at any given point in Jewish history. This is, perhaps, what the Talmud means when it says:

More difficult is a person's parnassah than the redemption (Pesachim 118a).

For, when it comes to redemption, it is clear Who is running the world. But, when it comes to parnassah, one can become easily fooled.

MELAVE MALKAH:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and also wept, when we remembered Tzion. (Tehillim 137:1)

For those who wonder how I choose which tehillah to write about each week, it is usually decided well in advance. Usually when I lay out an entire book's weekly readings, such as Sefer Shemos, I also determine then which tehillim I will focus on for each parshah.

Thus, I am also usually amazed at the timing of many psalms that "show up" at a time that matches the current political situation. Make no mistake about it: the "Tzion" referred to in this posuk bears little resemblance to the "Zion" of today, other than the fact that they both "lived" in Eretz Yisroel, and, that they both are things of the past, as we are witnessing with our own eyes.

According to the Talmud, G-d gave Dovid HaMelech a prophetic vision that allowed him to foresee the destruction of the First Temple, and the subsequent exile into Babylon (Gittin 57b). And, he was also able to see the destruction of the Second Temple, as the verse, "Remember, G-d, for the offspring of Edom, the day of Jerusalem." (7) alludes.

This is a psalm meant to make sure that we never stop mourning for Jerusalem, as the famous verse emphasizes:

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue adhere to my palate, if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy. (5-6)

In a sense, this verse is saying that if we willingly "forget" Jerusalem, and fail to appreciate her importance, then, our material success is in danger of being weakened. Any joy that we feel in life, until Jerusalem is re-built and the Temple has been returned to us, is supposed to be tempered with sadness for our incomplete spiritual state.

Thus, a bridegroom places ashes on his head right before the marriage takes place, and, a glass is broken under the Chupah. This is really the example for all of Jewish life until the Temple returns, for, Jewish life is full of reasons to have joy -- Bris, Redemption of the Firstborn Son, Engagement, Marriage, Dedication of a New House, etc. -- but, all of that joy must also be tempered with the remembrance that a Torah-built Jerusalem is the only true excuse for complete joy, since with it comes the Temple and the chance for the Divine Presence to dwell among the Jewish people.

If I may be so bold as to express a personal opinion, I think that the present crisis over Yerushalayim, and the Western Wall as well, is due to a lack of appreciation of what we had in our possession. As valuable as the Temple Mount is to us, because of what it once housed and will, b"H, once again house in the future, still, there is the problem of Jews going up onto the Temple grounds and into areas that Torah law says is forbidden to enter while in a state of spiritual impurity. The punishment for a Jew doing so is quite strict. This is why many rabbis feel that, at this stage of history, it is not the worst thing if Jews lose access to such holy grounds, until Moshiach comes, the Red Heifer is discovered, and Jews can become sufficiently purified.

However, the rest of Jerusalem is another story, and, especially the "Kosel." Among the many special things the Kosel represents, it has been a spiritual "magnet" for Jews all around the world (not to mention a great source of tourism for the Israeli people). Locally, it has been a tremendous source of inspiration for the many Jews who travel there regularly to pour their hearts and eyes out close to the King's palace, and at the place over which all the world's blessing descends before being distributed to the rest of the world.

Yet, for so many Jews around the world and even locally, it is all but forgotten. In so many places around Jerusalem, holiness seems to be a distant concept, with treif food and forms of entertainment popping in all kinds of places. How much of that can Jerusalem suffer? How much secularism can the Kosel bear witness to? How much longer will Heaven wait for the Jewish people around the world to wake up and realize what was given to them both decades ago, and, millennia ago? How much longer can the Temple Mount allow its present occupants to "dump" Temple artifacts in wadis (without a single protest from the Israeli government), while they tunnel away into her secret depths?

The question, it seems, is being answered for us, by history itself. Anyone who only sees as far as the local politics and current crises is being intellectual and spiritually short-sighted. We are living through "Biblical times," times of greater historical significance than we care to admit. Waking up to this reality sooner than later may limit the amount an ancient dream becomes a present nightmare.

Lack of intellectual and spiritual appreciation led to destruction in the desert after Mt. Sinai over three thousand years ago, and, during the times of each Temple. Let's learn from our past mistakes, and teach history a lesson or two, before it teaches us our lesson all over again.

There should only be good news.

Have a good Shabbos,
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