

BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 67, The Mitzvah of Writing a Sefer Torah. Good Shabbos and G'mar Chasima Tova, may you be sealed for a good year!

Rav Herzog on the Comparison of Torah to a Song

The pasuk [verse] from which we learn the mitzvah to write a Sefer Torah says "And now write for yourselves this song..." [Devorim 31:19]. The Torah refers to itself as a "Song" (Shirah). Why is Torah called Shirah?

Rav Herzog once gave the following explanation: In virtually all fields of study, a person who is uninitiated 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" [novel interpretation or insight] in his field of expertise. However someone who has never studied and never been interested in physics 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 Fifth Symphony is played -- regardless of whether one is a concertmaster 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.

Rav Herzog says that this is why the Torah is called "Shirah". On one hand, someone can be a great Talmid Chochom [Torah Scholar] and learn "Bereishis Barah Elokim..." [the first three words of the Torah] and see great wisdom therein. On the other hand, one can be a five-year-old child, just beginning to read, and learn "Bereishis Barah Elokim..." and also gain something from it. Every person, on his own level can have an appreciation for Torah. Therefore, the pasuk aptly refers to Torah when it says "And now, write for yourselves this 'song'!..."

Menachem Tzion on "Binu Shnos Dor V'Dor"

The pasuk in Parshas Ha'azinu says "Remember bygone days; understand the years of each

generation; ask your father and he will tell you, your grandfather and he will say it over to you" [32:7]. Even on a very simple and basic level, this pasuk is teaching the importance of having an appreciation for history.

It is very important for us to have an appreciation for history. If a person has an appreciation of what was, of tradition, of what transpired over the years, then he is capable of dealing with the present. A person has an obligation to remember and understand and to try to see the Hand of G-d (Hashgocha) in history.

When Willaim Shirer wrote his book "Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" (1959), he used as an epigraph, a quote from U.S. philosopher George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." This is a truth. We must remember history (Zechor Yemos Olam).

On a simple level, the next words in the pasuk, which say, "Binu Shnos Dor V'Dor" [Understand each and every generation], seem redundant. It appears to be nothing more than a poetic restatement of the beginning of the pasuk. On a homiletic level however, the Menachem Zion offers a very nice interpretation of this expression.

Yes, we must understand history and learn the lessons of history and apply them to our generation, but in addition to that, "Binu 'Shnos' dor v'dor". The Menachem Zion explains homiletically that the word 'Shnos' is not derived from the word 'Shana' [year] but from the word 'Shoneh' [different]. The meaning is that you must understand the changes from one generation to the next.

We can not blindly apply the same rules that worked in the past to present situations. If you try, you will fall short. Each generation is different. We can not glibly say "That's the way it was; therefore that's the way it has to be". Binu Shnos Dor V'dor -- learn the lesson of history, but bear in mind the changes from generation to generation. Times change, people change, and circumstances change. There are times when we must alter and redirect and not merely go with what was.

If someone today were to send a half million troops to the beaches of Normandy, he would rightly be called a "meshuganer" [crazy one]. While 50+ years ago there was indeed a need to fight a battle on the beaches of Normandy, that battle is now over; that battle has already been fought; and that battle has already been won. We cannot always continually fight the same battles again and again.

Understand the changes ('shnos') in each generation. Understand that each generation has it's own set of problems and own set of rules and own set of circumstances. We must remember the days gone by, but couple that remembrance with an understanding of the changes that take place in each generation.

In the past, I have quoted the 'Chassideshe vort' of Reb Levi Yitzchak regarding why Eliyahu HaNavi (rather than Moshe Rabbenu or anyone else) was the one designated to resolve all of the Talmud's "Teykus" [acronym used by the Talmud to indicate a question remains unresolved until Tishbi (Elijah) will provide the resolution].

The reason, the Berditchever says, is because Eliyahu never died -- he has been around in all generations. We need someone who has an understanding of each generation to pasken the shaylos [issue Rabbinic rulings on Halachic questions] for that generation. Therefore, only Eliyahu, who was present during all generations, is qualified to resolve the "Teykus".

Glossary

Chassideshe vort -- homiletic interpretation, popular in the teachings of Chassidic Rebbes, that teach a moral lesson from a Scriptural verse by deviating from the simple or literal interpretation

Personalities & Sources:

Rav Yitzchak Herzog -- (1888-1959) Chief Rabbi of Ireland and later Palestine - Israel.

Menachem Tzion -- Rabbi Menachem Ben-Zion Zachs.

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev -- (1740-1810) famous Hassidic Rebbe, disciple of Dov Baer of Mezhirech.

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- Tape # 296 - Ha'azinu: Does Eating Mezonos Require a Succah?

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