

The Pesach Shira Lingers

Yizkor and Parshas Shemini

Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The song of Moshe, at the miracle of the splitting of the sea, was sung with intense enthusiasm and joyousness. Since that SHIRA became a basic expression of Jewish devotion and closeness to Hashem, recited daily in the morning prayers, that recital, too, must be done with SIMCHA. So it is clearly stated in the Mishna Brura (chapter 51:17) in the name of the Zohar (adding the reward of forgiveness of sins, for reciting the SHIRA with joy).

In addition to the above complete SHIRA, we refer to it briefly before the Shemona Esra, Shachris and Maariv. There we state clearly that it was sung with immense joy "Lecho Onu Shira, b'SIMCHA RABA". Why is joy so indispensable a quality in SHIRA?

The first concept that comes to mind is the word "L'cho" (for you, oh Hashem). "Hashira Hazos leHASHHEM". The SHIRA for HASHEM expressed their innermost ecstatic joy sensing the presence of Hashem.

Upon further reflection, however, the SHIRA contains, in addition, another basic concept, which can surely elevate someone to burst into enthusiastic song. Moshe exclaimed, and Israel responded "Zeh... this is my G-d and I shall glorify Him, the G-d of my fathers and I will exalt Him. Rashi expounds the thrilling two words "Elokai Avi": "It is not I," says Moshe, "who initiates the sanctity of Torah and the Jewish people. Rather, holiness is firmly established upon me from the days of my forefathers. I am a follower, following the road of sanctity initiated by the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This road has already been cleared of any obstacles and dangers, physical or spiritual. The foundation has already been steadfastly installed. We travel on this road with powerful reassurance, as inheritors of the sanctity of the ancestors.

This alone can galvanize profound joyousness. We are privileged to stand in prayer to Hashem thrice daily, in the merit of the ancestors, who established these prayers. When Hashem will return us to Tziyon, Jacob will enkindle in us the holiday spirit, "Jacob will exalt, Israel will rejoice" (Tehilim 14:7).

In the Mincha prayer for Shabbos, we speak of Abraham and Yitzchok, too, as the ones who promulgate joy in their descendants. "Avrohom yogail, Yitzchok yeranain".

While to the Jewish people this is a source of pride and joy, it is also a source of envy and animosity on the part of the nations against the Jews. Bilaam expressed his uncontrolled and unhidden jealousy of Israel when he exclaimed "MiRosh Tzurim... I see this people through the speculum imaging their roots, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, remaining strong, established like rocks and hills" (Rashi, Bamidbor 23:9). Bilaam adds "Hain Am ... It is a nation that dwells alone..." When they rejoice, other nations cannot participate in their SIMCHA" (Rashi ibid).

The perspicacious observer understands the connection. The Jewish SIMCHA, stemming from being a descendant of the Avoth, and abiding by their heritage, is naturally exclusive.

The Kidush and Havdalah before and following a joyous holiday, as well as Shabbos, unequivocally expresses the chosenness (Bocharto) and separateness (Hamavdil) of Israel from the nations.

[Where does the Chumosh indicate uniqueness in Simcha? One conjectures it is the word "HAIN", stemming from "Hanoeh" (joy). Similar to "Hinai" when bringing BIKURIM (Devorim 26:10), upon which the Sifri (ibid) writes "Hinai", with SIMCHA".]

The above offers some insight on the timeliness of the YIZKOR service. At first glance, the joyous holiday, with the Halel, is an unsuitable time for YIZKOR which brings us to tears. Especially on Pesach and its SHIRA, which, as mentioned, is sung with joyousness. According to the above,

however, the element of the lineage, "Elokai Avi", is a source of abiding SIMCHA in Moshe's SHIRA.

One can sense an element of joyous comfort in the thought that by recalling parents and grandparents we link ourselves to the past generations, back to the ancestors. Similar to the SIMCHA our teacher Moshe experienced when he exclaimed "This is ... the G-d of my fathers and I will exalt Him."

We might, furthermore, see a relevance of Pesach to Parshas Shemini, which most often coincides with the week after Pesach (as pointed out by the Shem MeShmuel). This eighth day, following seven days of practice, coincided with Rosh Chodeesh Nisan. The Midrash teaches us that the Tabernacle was completed in the month of Kislev, and postponed to the first of Nissan, the birthday of Isaac.

The ancestors play a vital and central role in Avodah in the Mishkan; especially Isaac who is considered the symbol of AVODAH. It is because of this foundation established by this symbol of AVODAH that we can fulfill our own AVODAH with joy and bliss, "Ivdu es Hashem b'SIMCHA" serve Hashem with gladness (Psalms 100:2).

Expounding, finally, the Zohar comment (above) that by singing SHIRA with joy one is rewarded with atonement of sins, one may allude to the passage in the Tochacha, admonitions. The Torah there reads (Devorim 28:47) the punishments are due to the lack of avoda with SIMCHA, "Tachas... because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid gladness... " It stands to reason, thus, that one is spared, earning atonement, because of SIMCHA, especially SHIRA with SIMCHA.

As Chasam Sofer explains (ibid): Lacking simcha means regarding observance as a burden, a yoke. The Exodus, however, is meant to free us from the yoke of Egypt. Torah and Mitzva, is not yoke; it is the source of joy.

