

Hazzan Alisa Pomerantz-Boro Shevat 15 / January 26, 2013

Be-Shallach - Shirah

Yachad Na'amod. Together we will stand. All for one and one for all. Until we change the world. Together we will stand, Halleluyah.

Yashiru g'varim y'ladim v'horim. V'yachad nivneh olam shel tikvah. We will sing together, adults, children, and parents and together we will build a world of hope.

All three of Beth El's amazing choirs; our adult choir, Shir Nefesh-our teen choir, and Shira Chadasha, our beautiful children, just sang those meaningful words and I thank them and Cantor Leon Sher, our music director, for inspiring us with their voices and their spirit.

I want you to close your eyes and listen. Think about how you are feeling (**at this point, everyone closed their eyes and I sang selections from each of the following**):

Kol Nidre/Shindler's List/So Happy Together

There are countless articles written about the effect of music on listeners. In our Torah reading this morning, it is the **reaction** to a song that causes an emotional impact.

After the sea suddenly split in front of the Israelites, Moshe led the people in jubilant and grateful song, called *Shirat Hayam*, the Song of the Sea. Tradition tells us that Miriam, inspired by her brother, then led the women in an uplifting song, expressing her joy in witnessing the recent miracle; singing the same song that her brother did. The question is, why does the Torah present both songs, with the same words?

Our understanding is that even though it has the same words, Miriam's song is different because of the particular well of emotions that she expressed in her rendition. To gain purpose in the world, we do not have to be constant inventors; rather we strive to make the familiar new, rooted in our own innovation and direction of our heart. As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "if we allow ourselves to feel, our eyes can be remade for wonder-every instant can be refreshed, with the particular blessings filling the moment to capacity."

Our mystics teach that Moses and Miriam, inspired by the moment together, spontaneously sang the same words differently, at the same time. As Einstein famously suggested, "There are only two ways to live your life: One is as though nothing is a miracle.....the other is as though **everything** is a miracle!"

Perek Shira recounts how everything in the world sings: the lion sings, and the stars, and the trees. As a medieval spiritualist wrote so beautifully, "If you cannot sing like the nightingale

and the lark, then sing like the crows and the frog, which sing as God meant them to." This is the lesson of *Perek Shira* — all of Creation bears a song.

I read a *midrash* which suggested that Moshe had some difficulty teaching the people to sing and yet the cows **intuitively** sang songs of praise to Gd. Perhaps this is because humans have free will. When people sing praise to Gd, we do so out of choice. **Because we do so with intention**, our praise has more meaning and significance. Angels sing because that is what they are programmed to do. **WE** have to make a conscious choice to do so.

The Song at the Sea is a great lesson for us. It teaches us to place ourselves in proper context. Gd is merciful and good to all creatures. Our songs of praise should show proper appreciation to Gd. Because we have free will, our song does make a more significant impact. We can **choose** to praise Gd. How can we best sing our song to Gd? How can we best reflect on the many ways we are recipients of Gd's kindness and mercy?

We can immerse into gratitude and allow our souls to swell and then burst out into sweet song. We can sing along with others or hear what another is singing and not be deterred by what we too are singing. In the moment of revelation, as the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai, the words *shamor* and *zachor* were uttered by Gd at the same time. We too can sing our divergent songs at the same time, finding harmony in the discord and in the appreciation for puzzling our lives together.

As your Hazzan, you **must** know that I absolutely **LOVE** to hear you sing! This Shabbat is called "Shabbat Shira", the Shabbat of song. Please, I beg you...try it...you might like it! Open your *siddurim*. Open your hearts. Open your mouths! Sing loud and proud!! Close your eyes if you want. Let yourself **feel** the emotions. Allow yourself to really be in this moment and make the **choice** to praise G-d! As Rabbi Krupnick eloquently pointed out a few weeks ago, whatever challenges you may be facing, realize that you have far more potential than that for which you give yourself credit. You have overcome adversity in the past and can do it again. Circumstance may have placed new obstacles in your path, and they may be big ones. But the power to overcome them is in you. The message of the Jewish People's relationship with G-d is not about changing circumstances; it is changing your view of yourself. In other words, it is not the cards you are dealt, it is how you play the hand.

I have said this publicly before, and it bears repeating...

It is prayer that gives us the strength to get through the hard times. It is prayer that reminds us to keep the faith. It is prayer that reminds us to be grateful for all of the blessings in our lives.

Jewish tradition tells us to make 100 blessings a day.

Here's why: **A blessing is an expression of gratitude.**

While some of us complain about our meal,
others are just happy to be eating.

While some of us are frustrated with our careers,
others are just happy to be working.

While some of us complain about household chores,
others know they are happy to have a home.

While some of us get frustrated with our kids,
others are just grateful to see them at all.

While some of us are jealous of our friends,
others know that luck comes in many forms.

While some of us feel lonely,
others appreciate the people who are already there.

While some of us complain about the weather,
others are just grateful to see another day.

While some of us are annoyed at the cost of things,
others know the most joy often comes from things that are free.

While some of us feel like failures,
others know life has ups and downs.

While some of us feel trapped,
others are just happy to be free.

Hava Nashira means "please, let us sing together." I invite all 3 of our choirs to the *bima* once again to sing. Let us choose to be thankful and sing praises together. Let us thank *Hashem* for the many blessings in our lives and for the gift of this moment together.

Shabbat shalom.