



4 Minutes Of Torah

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The Song of Bnai Yisrael

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(15:1) THEN Moshe and Bnai Yisrael sang this song to G-d...

The Midrash Shmos Rabbah (23:4) comments on this verse: This is as it is stated "She opened her mouth with wisdom and the law of kindness is on her tongue..." (Proverbs).

From the day G-d created the world until Yisrael stood at the sea, we find no man who recited "song" to the Holy One. Adam, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, did not recite *Shirah*. And when the sea split for them, Bnai Yisrael immediately recited *Shirah*...

This Midrash interprets the verse from Proverbs as referring to Yisrael, and “opening” the mouth, as doing something entirely new in history: *Shirah*. Elsewhere in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 94a) we find that King Chizkiyahu, a potential candidate to be the Messiah, was disqualified because he did not sing Shirah after he was miraculously saved from a huge attacking army. This leads to an interesting question: Why were our forefathers not condemned for this same reason?

We might suggest using an idea found in many volumes called a “tzinor.” This is the concept that great people develop a new holy dimension – a new or revolutionary level of Mitzvah – and this becomes a “channel” for the idea to spread further, and even to develop to still higher levels. The one who conceives the new idea is like a pioneer who sets a precedent, while others who follow are simply continuing on a path already trodden.

A classic example might be Avraham who, in his time, created the new tzinor of *hachnosas orchim* – inviting strangers into one’s home for food and shelter, without expecting to receive any payment. We can see how this was a revolutionary idea in his time. Surely, many people must have thought he was either foolish or insane. To this day, it is his children especially who are tuned to this tzinor – to the amazement of gentiles all over the world. They (gentiles) are the children of Noach, and did not inherit this quality, so it seems strange to them.

Crossing the sea on dry land, Yisrael and Moshe created a new tzinor – singing praises to G-d – something never done before, as the Midrash said. We cannot criticize those who did not create a new tzinor. Our forefathers were satisfied with building altars and thanking G-d in their own way. We cannot criticize them for not creating the tzinor of Shirah, just as we do not criticize scientists through the centuries for not creating air travel or developing space travel to the moon. But once the tzinor of Shirah was created, we may indeed condemn King Tzidkiyahu for not following this example which, from his knowledge of the Torah, he was fully aware of!

With this concept we can now also appreciate, on a simple level, the introductory word in our quoted text, “THEN” since this is a special moment in Jewish history – the creation of a new tzinor at that awesome moment.

Nevertheless, we recognize King David, not Moshe, as the great singer of Israel. This can only be because he must have created a new tzinor for Shirah. And indeed he did; for he was the first who sang Shirah to G-d even in trouble and tribulation. Within his first ten psalms, there are already two such psalms – one when he was fleeing his own son Avshalom who was planning to kill him, and the other, when Bat-Sheva had a stillborn after her first encounter with King David.

This tzinor is surely the one that helped countless Jews sing “Ani maamin” even as they were led to the gas chambers in the last century. In view of the sad fact that most of our

history has been in Golus and tragedies, the tzinor of David was more fundamental to Jews for their survival — giving them the ability to dream, to hope, and to sing, even in sorrow and misfortune. Perhaps that is why the prophet Yirmiyahu can inform us that eventually, King David himself will return as our Mashiach (Yirm. 30:9). (Yirmiyahu does not speak of Mashiach Ben Dovid. Thus, on Shabbos morning, we sat in the Kedushah “al yedai Dovid Mashiach Tzidkecha.”)

Based on the famous Talmudic dictum which calls upon us to imitate G-d in His ways: “As he is merciful, be thou merciful....as He buries the dead, thou too bury the dead...” it may be argued that each pioneer who creates a new tzinor actually does not truly create it, but is the first to draw it down from the Heavens — for G-d is the ultimate Creator of every tzinor. Indeed, while Yisrael presented the world with a new tzinor at the crossing of the sea, G-d created song with the Torah itself which Moshe calls Shirah (Devarim, 31:19). Hence, had Yisrael crossed the sea after receiving the Torah, no true tzinor would have been fashioned then. Since it occurred before receiving the Torah, this song becomes the first song of the people and rates being considered the creation of the tzinor of Shira to G-d.

Good Shabbos.