

Welcome to all of our regulars and guests

<Mazal tovs><Welcomes>

R Tradburks NEXT SHABBOS

-

The Chartumim

First, a quick note which is not the derashah: When the International Court of Justice issued its decision yesterday, I knew I had to quote something I heard Rabbi Berel Wein say when I was in Israel.

Rabbi Wein noted that many stories in Tanach include parties who aren't vital to the story, but their bit part teaches us lessons. In one example, some stories include the **chartumim** – sorcerers, magicians, advisors to the king. The chartumim have three salient features:

- 1) First, they are always around to give advice,
- 2) Second: They are always **wrong**, and
- 3) Third: The Pharaohs continue to fund their existence and consult them anyway.

The chartumim have been wrong since the first time they showed up, struggling to interpret Pharaoh's dreams in Parshat Mikeitz. They continue to be wrong when they try to mimic the makkos of **דם**, **צפרדע** and **כינים**, and then to stand before Pharaoh during **שחיך**. They return in Sefer Daniel, unable to match the wisdom of Daniel, Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah, **and then** unable to explain Nevuchadnezzar's first dream, **and then** unable to explain his second dream.

To quote Rabbi Wein: the chartumim are like the New York Times. They've been wrong since the American Civil War, but they keep offering their opinion anyway.

What we learn from the chartumim is that just because society's elders, its advisors, say something, that doesn't mean it's correct. Don't believe society's elders just because they are elders. Sometimes they are just chartumim.

Shabbat Shirah

On a more serious note, though:

- Back in October, on Shabbat Bereishit, I asked a question: Are we **allowed** to enjoy ourselves when Klal Yisrael is at war, grieving so many deaths, being held hostage?
- Today, on Shabbat Shirah, I have a different question: **How** do we sing on Shabbat Shirah when we don't feel like singing? **איך נשיר את שיר ד'**? I may be **allowed** to sing, but I don't **want** to sing!

Two Approaches to Singing

One approach is to prepare ourselves to sing by rising to a rare level of spiritual perfection. A mishnah teaches, “**כשם** על הטובה, **שהוא מברך על הטובה**, Just as one blesses [Hashem] for the good, so one must bless Hashem for the bad.”¹ [Hence the practice of saying **ברוך דיין האמת** when hearing bad news.] In other words, **believe** that everything Hashem does is for the best. In that light, **there is no tragedy**; there are only greater and lesser degrees of celebration. But honestly, this is very difficult for **me** to practice.

Another approach, perhaps more realistic, is to **compartmentalize**, regulating our emotions by setting aside unhelpful thoughts. Or even better, to **not** compartmentalize, but to **recognize** that we can feel two different things at the same time.

Consider the two mutually exclusive commemorations of the Beit HaMikdash, *zecher l'churban* and *zecher l'mikdash*. The former grieves destruction. The latter celebrates the glory of what we had **before** the destruction. Two very different emotional moments, and we experience both. As Rav Doron Perez, CEO of World Mizrahi, said regarding marrying off one son while the other is being held hostage in Aza, “The pain doesn't cancel out the happiness, and the challenge and the curse doesn't cancel out the berachah. The human heart is very expansive and it's able to contain both.”²

So perhaps this is our task today: to put aside or acknowledge our thoughts of death and emotions of grief, and to sing with joy as we read about the march through the Sea.

¹ Mishnah Berachot 9:5

² https://baltimorejewishlife.com/news/news-detail.php?SECTION_ID=1&ARTICLE_ID=169043

A Different Approach: The Rizhiner

But upon reflection, and with help from Reb Yisrael of Rizhin, I'd like to suggest that I've had it **backward**. Shabbat Shirah is **not** a Shabbos for **us** to sing. It's a Shabbat for us to **watch** the Jews who passed through the Sea as **they** sang.³

Rabbi Yisroel of Rizhin⁴ observed that there are two kinds of relationships between special days and their Torah readings:

- Usually, we have a special Torah reading **because of** events that happened on certain dates. For example, on Pesach we left Egypt, so we read about Yetziat Mitzrayim. On Purim we were saved from Haman, so we read Megillat Esther. On Tisha b'Av the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, so we read Eichah and Yirmiyahu.
- But today is the 17th of Shevat, and we didn't cross through the Sea on the 17th of Shevat! We aren't reading Parshat Beshalach and the Shirah **because** it's the 17th of Shevat. Just the opposite; the Torah reading is what **makes** today a special day. Today is Shabbat Shirah **because** of the Torah reading, **because** we are up to Parshat Beshalach. **The Torah reading, the fact that we are watching the Jews sing at the Sea**, is what **makes** today Shabbat Shirah.

This parshah is special because the Jews who crossed through Yam Suf had many reasons **not** to sing.

- Yes, they survived 210 years of painful exile, but only after generations of Jews died in slavery.
- Yes, they escaped the torture of Egypt, but consider the midrashim about how many Jews died in Egypt during Choshech and never left!
- Yes, they crossed the waters of Yam Suf, but how many Jewish baby boys drowned in the Nile?
- Yes, they came out of the Sea safely, but they were entering a wilderness, without food and water!

And yet, **they sang**.

- Maybe because they reached spiritual heights in which they saw that everything was a Divine plan; we are taught that all of those Jews experienced prophecies greater than the visions of the Divine throne room of Yeshayahu and Yechezkel.⁵
- Or maybe they succeeded in compartmentalizing, having a zecher l'mikdash moment that dispelled their zecher l'churban. Or even in acknowledging and experiencing both at once, like Rabbi Perez.
- Or maybe they were just struck by the way Hashem reached out to them and rescued them –
 - How the Creator of the Universe sent a message to Pharaoh, בני בכורי ישראל, “My child, my firstborn, is Israel.”
 - How the Ribbono shel Olam declared 'כה אמר ד', “Thus speaks -d,” and commanded, שלח עמי ויעבדוני, “Send out My nation, and they will serve Me.”
 - How the King of Kings descended to Egypt to personally dispatch their tormentor, highlighting the unique status of the Jewish nation.
 - How they recognized their torturers vanquished, their chains irreversibly smashed, and tradition passed down from their founding fathers and mothers validated beyond the doubts of any הרטומים.

Parshat Beshalach is important because it shows us that human beings **can** sing, can have a positive relationship with Hashem, even when they have suffered and are grieving.⁶ That may not be us today, singing; we may not be ready. But it can be us tomorrow.

Our Shabbat Shirah

Our ability to sing is vital. We **need** to sing as Jews, religiously. And we **need** to sing as human beings, who feel hope and visualize redemption.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Dr. Viktor Frankl told the following story, that happened shortly after he was liberated from the camps:

I walked through the country past flowering meadows, for miles and miles, toward the market town near the camp. Larks rose to the sky and I could hear their joyous song. There was no one to be seen for miles around; there was

³ Although note: Netivot Shalom ibid. cites a story of Rav Naftoli meiRopshitz listening to this keriat hatorah and bursting into Hallel then and there.

⁴ Cited in Netivot Shalom, Shemot pg. 121

⁵ Mechilta d'Rashbi 15:2, among others

⁶ Like Chanah (Shemuel I 2) after Shemuel was born, and like Dovid (Shemuel II 22 and Tehillim) after his foes were vanquished.

nothing but the wide earth and sky and the larks' jubilation and the freedom of space. I stopped, looked around, and up to the sky - and then I went down on my knees. At that moment there was very little I knew of myself or of the world - I had but one sentence in mind - always the same: (מן המצר קראתי קה) 'I called to the Lord from my narrow prison and He answered me in the freedom of space.' How long I knelt there and repeated this sentence, memory can no longer recall. But I know that on that day, in that hour, **my new life started**. Step for step I progressed, until **I again became a human being**.

That was Dr. Frankl's Shabbat Shirah. This morning we read about our ancestors' Shabbat Shirah. May we each learn from those songs, and come to a Shabbat Shirah of our own.