



The Power of Music

We know that music plays an integral part of Judaism as we sing zemiros on Shabbos as well as at simchos, the leviyim sang shira, Dovid Hamelech is known as ne'im zemiros Yisrael (Shmuel 2, 23:1), sweet composer of songs of the Jewish people, and so on.

Let us cite the incredible words of the Maavor Yabok (Minhag Yisrael Torah, Volume 3, 619:5): there is a heichal, sanctuary, above in heaven, which is hidden, and can only be opened through song...One's soul receives pleasure from nigun since it was accustomed in this from the song of malachim...While the soul is in the body and hears a nigun, it gets pleasure, just as it was accustomed to when it was attached to its Source. From the tremendous sweetness, it is fitting that the spirit of Hashem rests there...

R' Shlomo Alkebatz (Manos Halevi, Esther 1:8) writes the power of melody and music is sweet to the soul of a person because the soul is accustomed to hearing the song of the malachim when it ascends through sleep, as then it hears how the malachim open their mouths in song and hymn. This is also why sleep overtakes little children when they hear nigun, and then their sleep is pleasant. The reason for this is that the sound of melody and music is rooted in their soul from before they reached this world. Then they were accustomed to hearing the kol zimra, sound of hymn, from the malachim.

What did the Gra say about nigun? The Gra remarked that most of the taamai haTorah, songs of the Leviyim and secrets of the Tikunai Zohar are impossible to know without the wisdom of music. Through nigun one can die from the soul's pining from its sweetness. Music can also resurrect a person. Moshe brought many

nigunim from Har Sinai (Pe'as Hashulchan, Hakdama).

Music can stir one up and awaken him. This is hinted to in the word nigun as it is related to the word gan, a place of moisture, as in l'hashkos es ha'gan, to water the garden (Breishis 2:10). Indeed, the Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzva 384) writes that nothing stirs a person like sounds of melody.

We see the power of music from the pasuk (Melachim 2, 3:15), "When the musician played for Elisha, the hand of Hashem came upon him" (he received the Divine Presence).

Music can lift one's spirits. When Shaul suffered from melancholy, Dovid would play the harp. Then, Shaul would be relieved, it would be well with him, and the spirit of melancholy would depart from him (Shmuel 1, 16:23).

It has been advised that when one is in a bad mood, feeling low, or having negative thoughts, he should listen to music. This advice is alluded to in nosain zemiros ba'layla (Iyov 35:10), as when one feels sad and depressed (layla), he should lift himself up with music – zemiros ba'layla. In fact, the Shevet Halevi writes that if one listens to music to get rid of his depression, it can be considered a mitzvah (Shevet Halevi, Orach Chaim, 6:69). We find an allusion to this in b'rogez racheim tizkor (Chavakuk 3:2), as its end letters spell zemer. That is to say, at times we may be in a negative mood – b'rogez. Through singing (zemer) we can get to racheim tizkor, being nicer and in a better mood.

If we take the letters above nachash, snake, what do we get? The letter before nun is mem, prior to ches is zayin, and before shin is reish. These letters spell zemer, song! This hints that zemer can be dominant over the force of the nachash,

thereby removing its influence (depression, negativity, and the like).

Music has the power to bring one to happiness. What does the pasuk say about this? ki b'simcha tai'tzau (Yeshaya 55:12), you shall go out with joy. That is to say, with happiness we can leave depression. The Mishna says that kol baalei ha'shir yotzin b'shir v'nimshachin b'shir (Shabbos 51b), all animals that normally wear a collar may go out with a collar and be pulled by a collar. Another interpretation is that one can rise above and out of himself through song and music!

In his older years the Modzitzer Rebbe needed surgery. Since his health was fragile, the doctors were concerned about anesthetizing him for the operation. As the situation was dire, the doctors asked the rebbe what to do. He suggested that instead of anesthesia, he would compose a new nigun. When the surgeon determined that the rebbe was fully engrossed in the new melody, he could begin the surgery. So it was. When the rebbe hummed the song, the surgeon performed the operation without the rebbe feeling any pain.

We must not confuse authentic music with that which is inappropriate music that can lead one astray. The initials of the words zimah mi'torascha rachaku (Tehillim 119:150. The simple meaning of the pasuk is that the pursuers of sinful counsel draw near, they are far from your Torah.) spell zemer, song. It can therefore be understood that there is a type of song that is considered zimah, sinful, as it is far from the ways of Torah (mi'torascha rachaku). Another allusion to this is found in mi bikeish zos mi'yedchem remos chatzarai, who sought this from your hand, to trample my courtyards, where the first letters spell zemer (Yeshaya 1:12).

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