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This Shabbos is especially called SHABBAS SHIRAH on account of the scriptural reading, this morning, of the AZ YASHIR, the song of Moses and Israel which they sang on the shores of the Red Sea which had they just crossed miraculously. This SHIRAH, or song, was the deep expression of joy by the People of Israel, their heart-felt happiness at their exodus from the slavery of Egypt, and their deep thankfulness to G-d that He had so favored them.

But AZ YASHIR was more than a victory song, or song of jubilation, by a subjugated people who had just won a war. Many nations have sung victory <sup>Songs</sup> ~~wars~~ composed in honor of martial victories, but they have faded from the world of music even as the wars & nations they commemorated dwindled in significance in the history books. If AZ YASHIR were only a primitive war song, we Jews would not recite it every day of the year, as part of our morning service. No, it is not only an ancient song of Israel. It is something infinitely more than that.

It is, for one thing, a song for all times. Today, 4,000 years after the great event, we still sing it. Our children and children's children will sing it long after what is now Egypt will have been submerged under new seas, and long after the pyramids will have been crumbled by the sheer weight of years. It is an eternal song.

And even more than that, AZ YASHIR is not only a national song but a personal hymn. Our mystics speak of individuals experiencing YETZIAS MITZRAYIM, the exodus from a personal Egypt. There comes a time in man's life when he leaves his foolish ways and his base interests, when he takes stock of himself and becomes aware of the G-dliness all about him. He changes his mind, his outlook and his whole way of life. When that happens, such a man sings his own personal AZ YASHIR in honor of his own YETZIAS MITZRAYIM. Every person, at some time or other, reaches that degree of happiness and thankfulness that he cries out: MI CHAMOCHA BA'EILIM HA'SHEM, "O G-d, thank you." And in every human breast there beats the unspoken hope, T'VI'AIMO V'SI'TA'AYMO BE'HAR NACHLAS'CHA, the hope for redemption, the hope for better and happier times. So that

AZ YASHIR becomes not only a song for Israel as a nation, but a song and hymn for each and every individual. This SHIRAH becomes, then, not only eternal, but also - universal. It is the eternal and universal expression of human joy, happiness, bliss.

Now, what about this personal AZ YASHIR of every person. Is there any preferred way of expressing it? Do we have any guide as to the manner in which the joys of Life should be sung? We certainly do. Our Rabbis of the Talmud, who generally more analytical in their observations than most people are, had some mighty important things to say about the manner in which a man should express his SHIRAH, the joy or song of his life.

ה'תש"ג

The Talmud records the following controversy between two Rabbis, R. Nechemiah and R. Akiva: we know that the SHIRAH of Egypt, the AZ YASHIR, was originally recited responsively, much as we occasionally indulge in responsive readings. Now one Rabbi said that the SHIRAH should be read like the HALLEL and the selections from the Psalms which we read on ROSH CHODESH and Holidays; and the other Rabbi maintained that the SHIRAH reading should be similar to that of the SHEMA, where the Reader merely begins the first word and then all the congregation reads together. Now, whatever might be the actual mechanics of the type of responsive reading is incidental. What is important is the meaning behind the Law, the symbols which Hallel and Shema really are, and what they tell us about how a Jew should sing his SHIRAH, how a Jew is happy. For both Rabbis have here enunciated great truths, eternal verities of the human, Jewish, soul at its happiest.

It is true, for one thing, that every man's SHIRAH should be similar to our Hallel. Hallel is the ultimate expression of unbridled happiness and thankfulness for G-d's goodness to us in the past. We recite it on YOM TOVIM, moments of joy for G-d's favors to us in years gone by. We are happy B'TZEISS YISROEL MI'MITZRAYIM, for our political freedom and independence. We thank G-d KI LE'OLAM CHASSDO, for his fatherly interest in our welfare. We are glad for MEKIMI ME'AFAR DAL, for our financial security and economic well-being. *We praise him for ... for our families.* We are healthy, secure and safe. We are therefore joyous and thank G-d for it. One aspect of SHIRAH, therefore, is that of HALLEL, we are happy that G-d has made things "go our way" in the past.



But the tragedy of the matter is that it so often remains a Hallel-type SHIRAH, and goes no further. There is a Kiddush and a party and a banquet and a band and no end of expenses to celebrate the Hallel, but where, O G-d, where is the Shma part of SHIRAH? Where is the honest devotion, the deadly serious planning for the future, and the sincere dedication of a lifetime which is so very necessary if a SHIRAH, if happiness, is to be complete and genuinely Jewish? Never mind the chanting of the Haftorah or even the whole Portion or even the Mussaf Service, where is the BECHOL LEVAVCHA UVECHOL NAF'SH'CHA UVECHOL ME'ODECHA, the heart and soul and substance of that child's life going to be spent?

No, friends, we have got to remember as never before that the Jewish SHIRAH, and especially that of the Bar Mitzvah, calls for more than a four-piece band and an M.C. It means BECHOL NAFSH'CHA, AFILU NOTEIL ES NAFSH'CHA, the readiness to sacrifice one's whole life for Judaism, It means BECHOL ME'ODECHA, ZEH MAMMON, the willingness to give all one's substance - yes, charity - for Jewish causes. It means VEHAYU HA'DVORIM HA'EILA AL LEVAVECHA, the desire on parents' part to study Torah, to build themselves too, to have the knowledge of Torah come in to their heads and settle in their hearts. It means VESHINANTEM LE'VANECHA, educating children for a life-time, and not - G-d forbid! - to stop at the 13th year. It means Jewishness BESHIVTECHA ~~BE~~VEISECHA UVELECHT'CHA BADERECH UVESHACHBECHA UWEKUMECHA, Jewishness at all times and in all places, a complete and total and absolute commitment to full, wholesome Jewish living. It means LE'OSS AL YADECHA ULETOTAFOSS BEIN EINECHA, <sup>Thinking Jewishly + not my Jewishly.</sup> (the Mitzvah of <sup>the</sup>effilin which a parent should train a child to observe every day of his life.) And, above all and beyond everything we have mentioned, it means MEZUZOS AL BEISECHA UVISHE'ARECHA, the Mezuzah on the door-post - that is, a Jewish home. All education, all teaching, all guidance is wasted if the home does not reflect that beauty of Torah. The SHIRAH means especially this part of SHMA - the terrifically earnest insistence that the parents are henceforth going to provide that child with Mezuzos, with a guide to his home, that the word of G-d will guide the entrance to his house, and make of an ordinary house a Jewish home.

This, then, is the insight with which our Sages provided us; the analysis of every man's and woman's SHIRAH; the moral and religious lesson that ~~Joy~~ the correct equation is Happiness equals Joy PLUS Seriousness; the saintly lesson that the Song of Life is a duet between Man and G-d; and that this great SHIRAH is to <sup>be</sup> sung both in major and in minor, in the key of festivity and in the key of dedication.

May G-d in His goodness grant each and every one of us a life full of SHIRAH; and let us make of that SHIRAH not only Hallel but also Shma; not only celebration but also resolution; not only thankfulness but also dedication; not only something of the Past, but a <sup>step across the threshold</sup> ~~shining plan~~ of Hope <sup>into</sup> for the great and brilliant Future.

BENEDICTION:

Almighty G-d,

Do Thou in Thy Infinite Goodness provide us with a MIZMOR SHIR LE'YOM HA'SHABBOS, with a life of Song worthy of Thy Sabbath Day; A Song in which TOV LE'HODOS LA'SHEM ULEZAMER LESHIMCHA ELYON, in which our whole beings will be filled with great Joy for Thy favors to us; and in which also, we will always remeber LE'HAGID BA'BOKER CHASDECHA VE'EMUNASCHA BA'LEILOS, that it is the sacred duty of each of us to consecrate ourselves to Thee Morning and night, throughout all our lives. Amen.