

Songs of Ascent: Musical Paths to Healing after Tragedy

3rd Annual Commemorative Torah Learning for 10/27

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I. The Tragedy of Music - Gen. 4:16-26

16 Cain left the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. **17** Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch. **18** To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begot, Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methusael, and Methusael begot Lamech. **19** Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah.

20 Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds.

21 *And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the flute.*

22 As for Zillah, she bore Tubal-cain, who forged all implements of copper and iron. And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

23 And Lamech said to his wives,
*“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
O wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.
I have slain a man for wounding me,
And a lad for bruising me.*

*If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
Then Lamech – seventy-sevenfold!”*

24 Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, meaning, “God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel,” for Cain had killed him.

25 And to Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh. It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name.

טז ויצא קין מלפני יקוק וישב בארץ נוד
קדמת עֵדוּן:

יז וידע קין את אשתו ותהר ותלד את חֵנוֹךְ
ויהי בנה עיר ויקרא שם העיר בשם בנו חֵנוֹךְ:

יח ויולד לחנוך את עֵיזָד ועֵיזָד ילד
את מחויאל ומחייאל ילד את מתושאל
ומתושאל ילד את למך:

יט ויקח לו למך שתי נשים שם האחת עדה
ושם השנית צלה:

כ ותלד עדה את יבֵל הוא הִיה אבי ישב אהל
ומקנה:

כא ושם אחיו יובל הוא הִיה אבי כל תופש כנור
ועוגב:

כב וצלה גם היא ילדה את תובל קין לטש
כל חרש נחשת וברזל ואחות תובל קין נעמה:

כג ויאמר למך לנשיו עדה וצלה שמעו קולי
נשי למך האזנה אמרתי כי איש הרגתי לפצעי
ויולד לחברתי:

כי שבעתים יקם קין ולמך שבעים ושבעה:

כד וידע אדם עוד את אשתו ותלד בן ותקרא
את שמו שת כי שת לי אלהים זרע אחר תחת
הבל כי הרגו קין:

כה ולשת גם היא ילדה בן ויקרא את שמו אנוש
אז הוחל לקרא בשם יקוק: {ס}

II. Singing from the Chaos - Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 52b

When David came to dig the foundations of the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple) he dug down fifteen hundred cubits and did not find the *tehom*, but in the end, he found a single teapot and wanted to throw it away.

It said, “You can’t [throw me].”

He said, “Why not?”

It said, “I am here to hold down the *tehom*.”

He said, “And since when have you been here?”

It said, “From the moment that the Compassionate One’s voice was heard at Sinai proclaiming, ‘I am YHVH your God,’ the land trembled and sank and I was put here to restrain the *tehom*.”

Even so, David didn’t listen to him.

He threw it away, and the *tehom* started rising and threatened to flood the world...

So David started to sing songs — the [Fifteen songs beginning] *Shir Hama’alot*... and for each song he sang, the *tehom* receded back to its original position.

וכן את מוצא בשעה שבא דוד לחפור
תימליוסים של בית המקדש

חפר חמש עשר מאוון דאמין ולא אשכח
תהומא

ובסופא אשכח חד עציץ ובעא מירמיתיה.
אמר ליה לית את יכיל. אמר ליה למה?
אמר ליה דנא הכא כביש על תהומא

אמר ליה ומן אימת את הכא

אמר ליה מן שעתא דשמע רחמנא קליה
בסיני אנכי יי' אלהיך רעדת ארעא
ושקועת ואנא יהיב הכא כביש על תהומא

אף על גב כן לא שמע ליה

כיון דרימיה סליק תהומא ובעא מטפא
עלמא....

התחיל דוד אומר שירה שיר המעלות שיר
למאה עולות על כל מאה אמה היה אומר
שירה אף על גב הוה סופה מתחנקה:



III. What Song Will Surface

<p>..And a husband is obligated to feed her, to redeem her, and to bury her — R. Yehudah says: Even a pauper in Israel should not provide less than two flutes and a wailing woman.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mishna Ketubbot 4:4</i></p>	<p>...יתר עליו הבעל שאוכל פרות בחייה ;וחיב במזונותיה, בפרקונה, ובקבורתה רבי יהודה אומר, אפלו עני שבִּישְׂרָאֵל לא יפחת משני חלילים ומקוננת:</p>
<p>35 And I will make an end in Moab —declares the LORD— Of those who offer at a shrine And burn incense to their god.</p> <p>36 Therefore, My heart moans for Moab like a flute; Like a flute my heart moans For the men of Kir-heres—</p> <p>37 Therefore, The gains they have made shall vanish. For every head is bald And every beard is shorn; On all hands there are gashes, And on the loins sackcloth.</p> <p>38 On all the roofs of Moab, And in its squares There is naught but lamentation; For I have broken Moab Like a vessel no one wants. —declares the LORD.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Jeremiah 48:35-38</i></p>	<p>לה והשבתי למוֹאֵב נֶאֱמַר יְקוּק מַעֲלָה בָמָה ומקטיר לאלהיו:</p> <p>לו על־כֵּן לְבִי לְמוֹאֵב כַּחֲלִילִים יְהִמָּה וְלִבִּי אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי קִיר־חֶרֶשׁ כַּחֲלִילִים יְהִמָּה על־כֵּן יִתְרַת עֲשָׂה אֲבָדוֹ:</p> <p>לז כִּי כָל־רֵאשׁ קַרְחָה וְכָל־זָקוֹן גִּרְעָה עַל פְּלִי־יָדָיִם גִּדְדוֹת וְעַל־מִתְנַיִם שָׂק:</p> <p>לח עַל פְּלִגְגוֹת מוֹאֵב וּבְרַחֲבֵתֶיהָ כָּל־הַמְּסַפֵּד כִּי־שִׁבְרָתִי אֶת־מוֹאֵב כַּכְּלִי אִיו־תִּפְּץ בּוֹ נֶאֱמַר יְקוּק:</p>



IV. Beyond the Surface: Putting Healing to Work

R' Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, *B'nei Mahshava Tova, No. 18 (excerpt)*

“...For a melody, ultimately, is only a kind of exposure of the spirit and its feelings, which are revealed in speech, as when one speaks with a friend of their thoughts and feelings of pain or joy, but this is even more true with the voice. As it is said in our holy books: when one's sorrows are overwhelming, God forbid, and one can no longer find the words to speak, then one will break down into crying and weeping, using only his voice, no words.

Therefore, the *nigun*, which comprises the sounds of the joy or bitterness that wakes a person's passions, through which the holy sparks and the limbs of the spirit are revealed —There is no guarantee as to what a person will do when their feelings are awoken or how the revealed part of their spirit will actualize.

Let us suppose there are two people who are experiencing joy. One may direct his feelings of joy into a deepening commitment to serve God; the other may be totally frivolous. Similarly with music, which is one of the keys of the soul, waking it and its passions. But it is possible to open our soul, to release some of our spiritual essence and then do nothing at all with it — or possibly damage it! If his joy is vacuous, if his angst leads to nervousness and despair, he will wound the portion of his soul that is exposed. When he falls from such a height, there will be enormous damage to his faith and foundations. The misuse of spiritual power can lead us to deeply improper actions, God help us!”

V. The Healing Community: Finding the Good Points

“Know that you must judge each person with the benefit of the doubt” (Pirkei Avot 1:6). Even with someone [who seems] entirely wicked, you must search out in them and find a tiny bit of good, since in that tiny bit, they are not wicked. And if you can find in them a bit of good, you can judge them with charity, and bring them, truly, to the side of merit, and even bring them to *teshuvah*...

Similarly, each person must find this [goodness] even in oneself...search out and collect other points of goodness, and through this process, they will become *nigunim* (melodies)...the essence of plucking good spirit from a depressed spirit...It is true that the song of holiness is so very high, as is known, and [that] the essence of this *nigun* comes from the elicitation of the good from the bad. It is by eliciting the points of goodness from the bad that *nigunim* and songs come about.”

Nachman of Breslov, Likkutei Mohoran I, 282

Look what love has done...
Turned a stone heart into gold
Made a new life out of old
Anyone can plainly see
That it was love that set you free.

Now we're brothers you and I
And I'll love you 'till I die
We are brothers all because
What love has done.

It used to be, you hated me,
You didn't understand
That every race and every man
Were fashioned by His hand.
That we're all the same within
'Neith the color of our skin
Yes you and I, we're all the same to Him.

Look what love has done...
When I look into your eyes
And you smile, I realize
What a miracle there'd be
If this whole world would come to see
That the greatest gift of all
Is to answer to love's call.

Yes, we are brothers all because
What love has done...

- *Leslie Young z"l (1967-2021)*

Written in honor of ex-Nebraska KKK Grand Dragon, Larry Trapp z"l. Published in *Not by the Sword: How a Cantor and His Family Transformed a Klansman* by Kathryn Watterson.