Listening for Our Inner Song: Thoughts on Parashat Lekh Lekha, October 31, 2009

View PDF

(This Angel for Shabbat column is sponsored by Yossie and Linnie (Tovli) Simiryan, in commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the passing of Reb Shlomo Carlebach.)

After going to battle to save his nephew Lot, Abraham meets with the king of Sodom. The king offers Abraham the booty from the war but Abraham declines to take anything for himself. Abraham introduced his response with the words: "I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord, God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth..." Most commentators take this to mean that Abraham took an oath.

The Midrash Talpiot, a compilation of rabbinic teachings by Rabbi Eliyahu haCohen of 18th century Izmir, cites a midrashic comment that Abraham's words were not related to an oath--but to a song! According to this comment, Abraham stood before the king of Sodom and sang a prayer! He prayed that he and his army had not killed any innocent people during the course of the battle.

I think this midrashic comment can be understood in another way. Each person has a unique contribution to make to this world; this contribution is embodied in the person's philosophy, talents, sensitivities, ways of helping others. Symbolically, a person's unique contribution can be described as a song--each person's special melody that imbues life with meaning and purpose.

When Abraham confronted the king of Sodom, Abraham sang his own song expressing that his life was lived in the context of the Lord God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth. Abraham's message to the king--and to all humanity--was the song of faith in one God, the song of ethical monotheism. Many people sing along with everyone else, and lose their own distinctiveness in the process. Abraham, though, sang a unique song that was to revolutionize humankind. His song was jarring to a pagan idolatrous world; but Abraham sang. His song was bold and deep and different from what others were used to; but Abraham sang. Abraham was on one side, and all the world on another side; but Abraham sang.

Each human being has his/her own song. Others may or may not appreciate it or even be able to hear it; but we each must be faithful to our inner music, the

melody that gives expression to what is best and most important to us. This is what Abraham demonstrated when he sang to the king of Sodom.

The late Reb Shlomo Carlebach changed the Jewish world with his music. He sang his own song, developed his own style. During his lifetime, he was not always appreciated; he had his share of detractors--but he kept singing, kept composing music. During the 15 years since his passing, his music has become ever more popular. He had a unique God-given talent of creating music that touches the human spirit at its core. He brought biblical verses and ideas to life through his music. He helped many thousands of us come closer to God. He taught us to look for the inner music within each of our souls.

The psalmist calls on us: shiru laShem shir hadash--sing unto the Lord a new song. Each of us has a true and authentic song that can bring happiness, freshness, and faithfulness into our world. Each of our songs is as old as we are--but each of the songs becomes new and renewed as we grow spiritually from day to day.

***Please share the Angel for Shabbat column with your friends and associates, and please visit jewishideas.org for many articles of interest on a wide range of Jewish topics. If you would like to sponsor an Angel for Shabbat column in memory or in honor of a loved one, please email mdangel@jewishideas.org

Angel for Shabbat