The Deepest Music: Thoughts on Our Redemption from Egypt

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Thoughts for Seventh Day of Pessah

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While in Jerusalem many years ago, I met a wise, humble man who was something of a mystic. In one of our conversations, he told me: There are three kinds of music. The first kind has melody and words. This is the usual song, easily understood, easy to remember. The second kind has melody, but no words. This is more profound. It has a definite rhythm, but cannot express itself in words, since it is too deep for words. The third kind has neither melody nor words. This is the deepest music, the music of the soul. It is so very deep and so very silent, that it goes to the very core of our being. When we have experienced this third kind of music, we have come close to God.

I think of this message each year when we read the Song of Moses on the Seventh Day of Pessah.

The Song of Moses is written in a different form from the rest of the Torah. Instead of the words being placed one next to the other across the column, the words are interspersed with blank spaces. This might be to underscore the poetic nature of this passage. Or it might also be to convey a deeper message.

If we just look at the ink, we can focus on a song--with words and melody.

If we look at the ink and the blank spaces, we can conceive of a different kind of song--one where the melody is primary and the words are less important.

If we just look at the blank spaces, we can focus on the deepest kind of song--one where the content and emotion are too powerful and too profound to be expressed in word or melody.

We actually can sing the Song of Moses on different levels of consciousness. On the obvious level, it is a song of thanksgiving to the Almighty. It reflects simple,

pure joy at a miraculous redemption. On a deeper level, the literal meanings of the words fade from our attention as we attune our souls to the spiritual rhythm of salvation. On the deepest level, we transcend the words and the melody and penetrate into a palpable silence. We attain the mysterious eternal music of a soul that comes into confrontation with the Almighty.

Rabbi Eliezer Papo (1785-1826), a great sage from Sarajevo, saw a spiritual crescendo in the verses preceding the Song of Moses. "And Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore." The Israelites felt immediate relief at seeing their enemies dead. "Israel beheld the great power which the Lord had shown against Egypt." The Israelites reached a higher level of insight. They weren't just happy that their enemies were vanquished, but recognized that it was the power of God that brought this salvation to them. "And the people revered the Lord." The Israelites, upon recognizing God's providence and power, ascended to the next level of spirituality: fear of God. "And they believed in the Lord..." The Israelites attained the highest level: faith, absolute trust in God. One might view these stages of spiritual development in consonance with the kinds of music discussed earlier. The Song of Moses and the Children of Israel reminds us to know the words, to sing the melody,and to enter the spiritual realm of music that transcends both words and melody.

The Pessah festival is a time of celebration of the Israelites' redemption from their servitude in Egypt. But as we commemorate the miraculous freedom from physical bondage, we must understand that the festival is also devoted to our spiritual re-awakening. Each of us has his and her individual song, the underlying melody which imbues our lives with meaning. As we sing our songs on deeper and deeper levels, we approach the grand spiritual fulfillment of which we are capable.

Angel for Shabbat