



HIGH HOLIDAYS

Sukkot 2

The Secret to Happiness: Music, Flutes & Water

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FETCH ME A MUSICIAN

THE SECRET TO HAPPINESS: MUSIC, FLUTES & WATER

ABSTRACT

Everyone wants to be happy. But what is the secret formula of happiness?

Do you ever feel that you are lost in a life of material duties and chores, which don't allow you to live up to your true potential? Do you ever feel like you have a voice – a song – trapped inside you, unable to be expressed? Is there a way to free your song, and release your voice?

A few thousand years ago, a special reed flute, smooth, thin, and from Moses, was played at the Temple during the Celebrating of Water-Drawing on Sukkot.

A few hundred years ago, the Baal Shem Tov and his students heard the music of the Holy Temple played from the flute of a simple shepherd.

A few years ago, Doctor Oliver Sacks, famed neurologist and author, documented a terrible amnesia case in an eminent musician and musicologist. Two miracles transcended his amnesia: the love for his wife, and his music.

What does all of this teach us about happiness, celebrating, and drawing upon our spirited ability to play our eternal music and everlasting divine song?

It teaches us that each of us has within the DNA of our souls an enormous power – the power of music, the power of our unique song. And on Sukkot we have the ability to release this song from its trappings, and find happiness despite our challenges.

1. Do You Have a Song to Sing?

Do you ever feel that you are lost in a life of material duties and chores, which don't allow you to live up to your true potential?

Do you ever feel like you have a song trapped inside you, unable to be expressed due to all the pressures of your life?

Do you feel that your unique voice is drowned out by all the demands, responsibilities and expectations tugging you in every which direction?

Is there a way to free your song, to release your voice?

So often we throw in the towel and feel resigned to the fact that we need give up on our deepest aspirations, ideals and dreams because of the “realities” that have taken over our lives.

Sukkot challenges that resignation. It teaches us that you indeed can free your inner melody and express your unique voice.

2. Story: The Baal Shem Tov and the Flute

A beautiful story will help us access our song.

This event took place during one of the frequent visits of the Holy Baal Shem Tov into the neighboring thick-wooded forests to meditate and contemplate on G-d's infinite glory so awesomely revealed in nature. Most often he would go alone into the forest; the seclusion providing him with the ability to get truly close to the divine. On other occasions, such as this, and for reasons revealed only unto him, the Rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov, would bring along with him several of his disciples.

As the group walked together through the profuse green forests, they suddenly heard a very beautiful melody. The Baal Shem Tov followed the music; his chassidim close behind him. As they neared, they discovered a young shepherd boy playing a melody on his wooden hand-crafted flute. They were all enthralled by the mesmerizing sounds emanating from the flute.

When the lad finished playing the tune, the Baal Shem Tov offered him a kopeck, asking him to play the melody again. The shepherd boy was pleased, and played the song once more. The chassidim watched as their holy Rebbe closed his eyes, and swayed with the tune. They too were carried away by the exquisite unfamiliar song.

After the shepherd boy concluded playing, the Baal Shem Tov once again requested that he play the tune, and handed him another coin. The boy was thrilled with his good fortune, and played the melody a third time. The beauty of the song was beyond description. The chassidim felt their souls being lifted to a place of sublime holiness as the music filled the air.

As the boy finished playing, he was surprised that the Baal Shem Tov asked him to play the melody yet one more time, slipping a third kopeck into his hand. And so the shepherd boy played the melody on his flute once more. The chassidim found themselves dancing, their spirits so stirred by the splendor of the music. And they saw the Master entranced, reaching up to heaven with uplifted hands, tears falling from his closed eyes.

Then the Baal Shem Tov asked the boy to play the melody once again. But this time mysteriously the boy was unable to play the song. As much as he tried he realized that the melody had been erased from his memory! He could not recall a single note.

Upon seeing this lapse, the Baal Shem Tov smiled sweetly and led his chassidim out of the forest.

Later the disciples asked their teacher to explain what had transpired in the forest. The Baal Shem Tov explained that when the Holy Temple was destroyed, the niggunim, the songs of the Levites too were exiled along with the people of Israel. The melody the shepherd boy played on his flute was one of these exiled melodies.

The Baal Shem Tov thanked G-d that he had been able today to pay the ransom and free the Levites' song from its captivity, so it could at last ascend to heaven until the time when the third Holy Temple will stand again.

Once it ascended the shepherd boy could no longer play the song. But the song will be played again when the Third Temple will be rebuilt.

3. Your Inner Music

This touching story teaches us all a vital lesson. A lesson which is especially pertinent on Sukkot, *zman simcho'seinu*, the time of our rejoicing. A lesson which we all can use especially when life can seem so uncertain and confusing.

The lesson is that even when we may feel trapped, even when we our song and voice may be exiled and concealed, we can find ways to access it and express that song and voice.

Everyone wants to be happy. But what is the secret formula of happiness?

Sukkot offers us the answer and the formula. It empowers us with the ability to sing the melody and play the music of the Holy Temple.

Simply put, we each have a melody – actually, many melodies – embedded in our psyches, in the DNA of each and every one of our souls.

Even if you may think or see yourself as a simple person, a simple shepherd boy, you still have the song inside of you. Because the fact is, that you are not so simple as you may think. By virtue of being created by G-d in the divine image you – and every person on earth – is a special soul.

However, that music – your unique voice – can easily get concealed under the covers and layers of our material world.

That concealment is called “exile.” Exile manifests both on a personal level for each one of us, and collectively.

There are times when we feel “exiled” – spiritually displaced from our true identities; or psychologically and emotionally disoriented, feeling out of sorts and lost, out of place; or feeling despondent and down.

All of us are presently in *galut*, in exile. We live in a world where there is a dissonance and dichotomy between our material lives and the purpose for which we were sent here. A schism between our bodies and our souls, between what we do and who we are, between survival and transcendence.

When Moshiach comes in the final redemption, we will experience both personal and global Geulah – when our souls and our divine purpose will be revealed for all to see. When we will achieve a higher state of consciousness and awareness – when the “business of the entire world will be solely to perceive the divine.”¹

But here is the good news: Even when we may be in “exile – personally or collectively – we each have our inner music that was “exiled” with us. A music waiting to be released, even this very day.

We each have our unique “flute.” And on Sukkot we are empowered with the ability to play our song.

4. Flute in the Temple

The Mishnah in Sukkah² teaches:

We play the flute for five or six days [depending on whether Shabbat falls out on Yom Tov or Chol Hamoed]. This is the flute of Simchat Bet Hashoevah, the Celebration of Water-Drawing, which overrides neither Shabbat nor Yom Tov.

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the “Pouring of the Water” (*nisuch hamayim*) was an important feature of the festival of Sukkot. Throughout the year, the daily offerings were accompanied by the pouring of wine on the altar; on Sukkot, water was poured in addition to the wine. The drawing of water for this purpose was preceded by all-night celebrations in the Temple courtyard, with instrument-playing Levites, torch-juggling sages, and huge oil-burning lamps that illuminated the entire city. The singing and dancing, called Simchat *Bet Ha’shoevah* (the Celebration of Water-Drawing), went on until daybreak, when a procession would make its way to the valley below the Temple to “draw water with joy,”³ as elaborated on in the Talmud.⁴ We commemorate this celebration today in our Sukkot dancing and singing.

The Jerusalem Talmud⁵ adds another dimension to the “water-drawing” celebration:

¹ Rambam Hilchos Melochim 12:5.

² 50a.

³ Isaiah 12:3.

⁴ Sukkah 51a-b. See Meaningful Life Sermon, 2nd day of Sukkot 2014.

⁵ Sukkah 5:1.

Said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, “Why is it called the Celebration of Water-Drawing? For therein is drawn the Divine Spirit, as per, *And you shall draw water with joy from the fountains of the salvation.*”⁶

Tosafot⁷ elaborates on the connection between, drawing, celebration, joy, and the Divine Spirit:

For the Divine Presence dwells within joy, as it states: “*And now fetch me a musician.*” *And it was that when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him.*”⁸ And it cites the case of Jonah ben Amitai [the prophet], who ascended to the Temple in the festival pilgrimage and, at the Water-Drawing Celebration, the Divine Presence dwelled on him.

This adds a new element to the “water-drawing celebration,” *Simchat Bet Hashoeva*: Through joy we also “draw” the Divine Presence into our lives. Why? Because the Divine Presence only rests where there is joy and happiness.

And since the joy of *Simchat Bet Hashoeva* was the greatest joy ever seen – as the Talmud declares: “One who did not see the joy of the water-drawing celebrations, has not seen joy in his life”⁹ – we can conclude that this celebration drew the greatest amount of Ruach Hakodesh and the Divine Presence.

And this is why the Mishnah teaches that we play the flute on these five or six days: “*And now fetch me a musician.*” *And it was that when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him*” – the music of the flute generated joy, which in turn generated the dwelling of the Divine Presence.

Though we don’t have today the physical Temple and the physical flute, yet we have all these powers in their spiritual form. We each have the ability to celebrate the joy of *Simchat Bet Hashoeva* and play our individual “flute” – and in the process draw down the divine presence into our lives.

By virtue of the divine soul within each one of us, we have our inner music that can always be freed even from the deepest exile and prison.

5. Music That Cannot Be Trapped

You may be wondering if anyone has ever witnessed this power of music to break out of an exiled state.

Listen to this unbelievable medical miracle – what happens when amnesia meets music – and you’ll see the magic of the musical soul.

⁶ Isaiah 12:3.

⁷ Sukkah, 50b, sv. Chad Tani Shoeva.

⁸ II Kings 3:15.

⁹ Sukkah 51a-b; 53a.

Oliver Sacks, the great neurologist and author (and Jew), wrote a 2007 book called *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. In a piece in *The New Yorker*, titled *The Abyss; Music and Amnesia*, Sacks elaborates on a section of his book dealing with a respected musician who lost his memory.

In March of 1985, Clive Wearing, an eminent English musician and musicologist in his mid-forties, was struck by a brain infection... He was left with a memory span of only seconds—the most devastating case of amnesia ever recorded. New events and experiences were effaced almost instantly. As his wife, Deborah, wrote in her 2005 memoir, “Forever Today”:

His ability to perceive what he saw and heard was unimpaired. But he did not seem to be able to retain any impression of anything for more than a blink. Indeed, if he did blink, his eyelids parted to reveal a new scene. The view before the blink was utterly forgotten. Each blink, each glance away and back, brought him an entirely new view.

In addition to this inability to preserve new memories, Clive had a retrograde amnesia, a deletion of virtually his entire past.

...Deborah wrote of how, coming in one day, she saw him holding something in the palm of one hand, and repeatedly covering and uncovering it with the other hand as if he were a magician practicing a disappearing trick. He was holding a chocolate. He could feel the chocolate unmoving in his left palm, and yet every time he lifted his hand he told me it revealed a brand new chocolate.

“Look!” he said. “It’s new!” He couldn’t take his eyes off it.

“It’s the same chocolate,” I said gently.

“No . . . look! It’s changed. It wasn’t like that before . . .” He covered and uncovered the chocolate every couple of seconds, lifting and looking.

“Look! It’s different again! How do they do it?”

Within months, Clive’s confusion gave way to the agony, the desperation...

Clive said at one point, “Can you imagine one night five years long? No dreaming, no waking, no touch, no taste, no smell, no sight, no sound, no hearing, nothing at all. It’s like being dead. I came to the conclusion that I was dead.”

...From the start there have been, for Clive, two realities of immense importance. The first of these is Deborah, whose presence and love for him have made life tolerable, at least intermittently, in the twenty or more years since his illness.

...The other miracle was the discovery Deborah made early on, while Clive was still in the hospital, desperate-

ly confused and disoriented: that his musical powers were totally intact. “I picked up some music,” Deborah wrote:

“...and held it open for Clive to see. I started to sing one of the lines. He picked up the tenor lines and sang with me. A bar or so in, I suddenly realized what was happening. He could still read music. He was singing. His talk might be a jumble no one could understand but his brain was still capable of music... Clive could sit down at the organ and play with both hands on the keyboard, changing stops, and with his feet on the pedals, as if this were easier than riding a bicycle. Suddenly we had a place to be together, where we could create our own world away from the ward. Our friends came in to sing. I left a pile of music by the bed and visitors brought other pieces.”

Clive cannot retain any memory of passing events or experience and, in addition, has lost most of the memories of events and experiences preceding his encephalitis—how, then, does he retain his remarkable knowledge of music, his ability to sight-read, play the piano and organ, sing, and conduct a choir in the masterly way he did before he became ill?

A piece of music will draw one in, teach one about its structure and secrets, whether one is listening consciously or not. This is so even if one has never heard a piece of music before. Listening to music is not a passive process but intensely active, involving a stream of inferences, hypotheses, expectations, and anticipations. We can grasp a new piece—how it is constructed, where it is going, what will come next—with such accuracy that even after a few bars we may be able to hum or sing along with it. Such anticipation, such singing along, is possible because one has knowledge, largely implicit, of musical “rules” (how a cadence must resolve, for instance) and a familiarity with particular musical conventions (the form of a sonata, or the repetition of a theme). When we “remember” a melody, it plays in our mind; it becomes newly alive.

Thus we can listen again and again to a recording of a piece of music, a piece we know well, and yet it can seem as fresh, as new, as the first time we heard it. There is not a process of recalling, assembling, recategorizing, as when one attempts to reconstruct or remember an event or a scene from the past. We recall one tone at a time, and each tone entirely fills our consciousness yet simultaneously relates to the whole. It is similar when we walk or run or swim—we do so one step, one stroke at a time, yet each step or stroke is an integral part of the whole. Indeed, if we think of each note or step too consciously, we may lose the thread, the motor melody.

It may be that Clive, incapable of remembering or anticipating events because of his amnesia, is able to sing and play and conduct music because remembering music is not, in the usual sense, remembering at all. Remembering music, listening to it, or playing it, is wholly in the present.

Victor Zuckerkandl, a philosopher of music, explored this paradox beautifully in 1956 in “Sound and Symbol”:

“The hearing of a melody is a hearing with the melody... It is even a condition of hearing melody that the tone present at the moment should fill consciousness entirely, that nothing should be remembered,

nothing except it or beside it be present in consciousness... Hearing a melody is hearing, having heard, and being about to hear, all at once... Every melody declares to us that the past can be there without being remembered, the future without being foreknown.”¹⁰

6. Why is Music so Powerful?

Frankly, all the scientific theories cannot fully explain how music defied Clive’s amnesia.

The joy of Sukkot, the song and melody of Sukkot, which draws out the soul’s inner music, and draws down the Divine presence, can indeed explain how music can free one of any exile, whether it be physical, emotional or due to amnesia.

There is something about melody that draws out the deepest resources within the soul, allowing us to transcend and defy our metaphorical, spiritual or emotional amnesia – the different forms of dissonance and denial we often experience, or the forgetfulness and resignation we may face.

And that is what we celebrate on Sukkot: The power of the Sukkot flute – to draw our souls and the divine presence. *When the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him.* Like the shepherd boy, whose flute produced, with the Baal Shem Tov’s inducing, a melody from the Holy Temple, we too can draw down sacred divine music with our metaphorical flutes as we celebrate the joy of *Simchat Bet Ha’sheva* Sukkot.

How do we create such music with our spiritual flutes? How does music have the power to produce such joy and happiness that also engenders the revelation of the Divine Presence?

7. Pure Music is Gold

A fascinating Talmud describing the flute in the Temple sheds some light on the matter:

The rabbis taught: There was a flute in the Temple. It was smooth. It was thin. It was made of reed. And it was from the days of Moses. The king commanded it to be plated in gold and it no longer had that pleasing sound. They removed the gold plating, and it once again sounded pleasing.¹¹

Every detail described by the Talmud teaches us something essential. Why are we told that the flute was 1) smooth, 2) thin, 3) made of reed, 4) from Moses, and 5) sounded worse when covered in gold?

The Talmud is teaching us the profound power of the musical flute:

¹⁰ <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/09/24/the-abyss>.

¹¹ Erachin 10b.

Music touches the very core essence of our souls. Just witness how a song can captivate and mesmerize us, how it can transport us to another time and place. Indeed the same Talmud teaches that *Chalil*, Hebrew for “flute,” is rooted in the word *Chali*, meaning “sweet.”

The sweetest and most resonating music happens when an instrument is 1) smooth and straightforward, 2) thin and simple, 3) made of humble material, 4) it connects us back to our roots, Moses, reminding us of eternity (as we shall see in the following, incredible story), 5) and fancy trappings of gold – symbolizing superficial materialism – only distract and detract from the pure music.

And now fetch me a musician...when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him.

The more we can emulate these features of the flute – being straightforward, simple (not too overblown or complex), humble, rooted and non-materialistic – the more we can play our pure inner music and draw the waters of the Divine Presence in our lives, in the lives of our families and our communities.

My dear friends, we indeed have great power within us, and it is unleashed when we sing, dance and celebrate on Sukkot.

8. The Key to Happiness: Playing the Music of the Divine Spirit

Friends, let us call out to each other: “*now fetch me a musician.*” Let us all become musicians, and when the musician plays “*the hand of the Lord came upon him.*”

*And you shall draw water with joy from the fountains of the salvation.*¹²

Today we celebrate because we, like the Baal Shem Tov, hear the music of the Temple being played by the flutes of the shepherd.

Our singing and dancing, celebrating *Simchat Bet Hashoeva* surely draws the Divine Presence upon us all – and perhaps to an even greater extent: for despite our still being in exile, nevertheless we are happy and celebrate the eternal music and G-d’s everlasting song.

Gut Yom Tov and Chag Sameach!

¹² Isaiah 12:3.