

Sing and Rejoice, Daughter of Zion!

Haftorat Miketz - Chanukah

Zechariah 2:14-4:7

The light of Chanukah is again shining its educational light upon us. Chanukah comes from the word Chinuch which means education. During this blessed holiday we can get a glimpse of the future perfected reality. At that time the light of the woman will grow, and laws that seemingly denigrate women will no longer apply. We live in the exciting time of transformation. In my commentary on the Chanuka Haftorah I discuss how to deal with issues such as "Kol Isha" (women singing in the presence of men) at the shabbat table.

I bless you to get in touch with your inner light of Chanukah, and shine it into your relationships, so we together can build the Temple of Unconditional Love!

The Feminine Song of Redemption

Sing and rejoice, Daughter of Zion! For lo, I come; and I will dwell in your midst — declares Hashem (Zechariah 2:14). The word "roni" which we translated "sing" is one of the ten Hebrew expressions for happiness (*Song of Songs Rabah 1:29*). Hashem tells the Daughter of Tzion to shout for joy as He is coming to dwell within her and manifest His *Shechinah* below. It is hard to understand the connection between this verse and Chanukah. Therefore many commentaries wonder why the *haftorah* for Chanukah didn't begin with the description of the golden Menorah in Zechariah Chapter 4. According to the Arizal, (*Sefer Pri Etz Chaim, Gate 208, on Chanukah and Purim, Chapter 4*), every redemption that Israel experienced came about through a woman, and therefore all the songs praising Hashem for redemption were in the feminine language "*shirah*" (rather than "*shir*"). This is because these redemptions were from "*sefirat hod*," (the character of glory – a feminine manifestation of Hashem's light from the left side of the Tree of Life). The redemption from Egypt came about through Bityah the daughter of Pharaoh. The redemption from Persia was by means of Esther, and the redemption from Greece by means of Yehudit. Therefore, since the miracle of Chanukah came about through the light of "*hod*," we can understand why women are accustomed to refrain from work as long as the candles are burning (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 670 seif 1*). This explains why we read "Sing and be happy daughter of Tzion" in the *haftorah* for Chanukah!

The Daughter of Tzion Will Sing Even with Men!

According to the *B'nei Yissaschar* based on the Chida, wherever the *Shechinah* dwells one does not have to be concerned about "*Kol Isha ervah*," (the voice of a woman is her private part) (*Berachoth 24a*). Therefore, Devorah said "I am for Hashem, I can sing" (*Shoftim 5:3*). Since Devorah's dedication to Hashem caused the revelation of the *Shechinah*, she was permitted to sing together with a man, as it states "And Devorah and Barak sang..." (ibid. 1). This explanation goes according to the simple reading of the text, that Devora was married to Lapidot and not to Barak. In the same way we can explain "And Miriam the prophetess took... and Miriam answered them sing to Hashem..." (*Shemot 15:20*). Miriam is specifically called a prophetess in this context, since the *Shechinah* was resting on her while she was prophesying and she, therefore, was not concerned about

arousing *hirhurim* (improper thoughts) among the men while she was singing. Likewise the Chida explained our verse: "Sing and be happy daughter of Tzion," and don't be concerned about "*Kol Isha*" (the voice of a woman), "...for behold I come and dwell within you."

May Women Sing with Men?

After having been a *Ba'alat Teshuvah* (returnee to Judaism) for almost thirty years, and having held my voice back from singing at the Shabbat table all these years whenever we have male guests, I was quite astonished to find this Torah of *B'nei Yissaschar* permitting women's singing with men when the *Shechinah* is present. Rav Kook writes in *Mussar Avicha* that separation between men and women is necessary, and the laws of *tzniut* override even basic tenets of common courtesy, because the *yetzer hara* is so potent in this lower world. Only in the World of Truth, can the love and friendship, which should have been equal between men and women all along, find its true expression. Therefore, we should not jump to apply the principles of the *B'nei Yissaschar* to our daily reality, even to our holy Shabbat table, which may not yet have reached the level of *Shechinah* that graced Miriam by the Sea, or Devorah after the victory over Sisera. Yet on the other hand, I often find that the chatter of us "pious women" while the men sing *zemirot* (Shabbat hymns) detracts from the *kedusha* (holiness) of the Shabbat table, and I often wonder whether Hashem would not prefer if we women take part of the *zemirot* softly without singing at the top of our lungs.

Mixed Singing at the Shabbat Table

The question of the applicability of "*Kol Isha*" to *zemirot* is controversial in *halachic* responsa. Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (*Teshuvot Seridei Eish* 2:8) notes that although women traditionally refrained from singing *zemirot* in the presence of men other than immediate family members at the Shabbat table, the practice in Germany was for women to sing *zemirot* in the company of unrelated men. Rav Azriel Hildesheimer and Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (two great German Rabbis of the nineteenth century) sanctioned this practice. They based their ruling on the Talmudic rule (Megilah 21b) that "*Trei kali lo mishtamai*," – two voices cannot be heard simultaneously. There is a great difference between a woman performing and singing from the depths of her *neshamah*, and a group of women singing quietly together with men at a Shabbat table in a family setting. While it states in the *Gemara* (Sota 48a) that men and women singing together is a major impropriety, the Divrei Cheifetz asserts that the *Kol Isha* prohibition does not apply to women singing *zemirot*, singing songs to children, and lamentations for the dead. This authority explains that in these contexts, men do not derive pleasure from the woman's voice.

The Tighrtrope of Yearning

According to *B'nei Yissaschar*, Chanukah comes to educate us about the final redemption. The *Mekor Chaim* explains that "Daughter of Tzion" is a metaphor, referring to the body of the Jewish people, more specific to the body of the *tzaddik*. "Sing and rejoice, Daughter of Zion! For lo, I come; and I will dwell in your midst" describes the joy of the *tzaddik*, who is able to turn his body into a *mishkan* (dwelling place) for Hashem's presence. The highest level that we aspire to reach is not only to have pure thoughts, but to purify even the physical body from desires that are not for the sake of Hashem. During our long-winding exile there have always been great individual *tzadikim* who have succeeded in making their body a sanctuary for Hashem's presence. At the time of our imminent

redemption we will eventually all reach this great uplifted level. As we draw closer to the final redemption when the *Shechinah* will be revealed within all of us, the voice of women is yearning to sing for joy. Until we reach this level, we must walk on a tightrope seeking the delicate balance between being strict in *tzniut* (modesty) without being too lenient in good manners, interpersonal relationships, and the *kedushah* (holiness) of Shabbat. May the light of Chanukah penetrate our souls and bring about the indwelling of the *Shechinah*, so that one day we can join Miriam and Devorah's exalted song and "Sing and rejoice" in the perfected world of holiness where we no longer have to be concerned about "Kol Isha!"