

The Crown of Song



Dear Friend,

Cheesecake. Flowers. A beautiful table. What is the spiritual dimension of Shavuos, particularly for women?

If Moshe Rabbeinu brought us down the Torah, Miriam brought us the Torah of shirah, song. **What is this dimension of Torah? How is it connected with Miriam? And how can we find it in our own lives?**

Discover how this is connected with the spiritual energy of Keser, crown. And be inspired by the inner reason for Rabbi Akiva's gift of a crown to his wife Rochel.

This Shavuos, discover your own Torah of song.



Matan Torah transformed the world at large and all those who were present. Men, women, and children saw the revelation of Hashem, heard the Aseres Hadibros, and received the Torah into their hearts and minds thus becoming not only Hashem's child, born on Pesach, but His bride. Every year, that experience is repeated as we once again receive the Torah—men, women, and children.

For men, there is an obvious way to connect with the spiritual energy of the time. Limud Torah. Tikun Leil Shavuos. Bending over a volume of Gemara, intoning the words with the ancient and timeless niggun. **But what is the pathway of women?** How do women connect to Shavuos—and how do they celebrate Shavuos?

To answer this, let's turn to the leaders who

brought us the Torah. Moshe and Aharon led the people as a whole; Moshe went up to Shamayim to receive the Torah. The sources tell us that there was another aspect of Torah—the dimension called shirah, song. "V'ata kisvu lachem es hashira hazos—Write for yourselves this song" refers to writing down the Torah. **This aspect of Torah is especially connected with women—and with one woman in particular.** If Moshe Rabbeinu brought us down the Torah, Miriam brought us the Torah of shirah, song. (Fascinatingly, the Gemara refers to a place in Shamayim called Heichal Miriam. There, the souls of righteous women sit and sing.)

There is a dimension of Torah that is called Shirah, that is intrinsically connected to women in general and in particular, to Miriam. Let's take a few minutes to analyze this.

Notes of a Melody

The word Shira, song, is related to the word sharsheres, meaning a chain comprised of many links, or a necklace that is a series of beads strung together. What is the connection? A necklace is made up of many links, and the aggregate forms an item of beauty and value that adorns the wearer. This parallels our understanding of song. What is song? A series of notes, played in sequence, that together forms a melody. And when do klal Yisrael sing? When a series—or chain—of events—which often look calamitous—suddenly form a sequence that brings them to redemption. The personality who teaches us this is Miriam.

Miriam Haneviah gifts every woman in klal Yisrael with song.

Miriam's Song

We have an unusually large amount of information about Miriam. As a young girl, we encounter her protesting her parents' separation: "Pharoah decreed against the boys, but you are acting against the girls, too," she argued. Her parents remarried and sure enough, a boy was born. Even when baby Moshe is placed in a basket in the Nile, Miriam stands over him, ensuring his safety. When Basya finds him, she arranges that her mother Yocheved becomes Moshe's nursemaid. As one of the midwives in Egypt, Miriam continued her quest for life even as Pharaoh demanded

that she comply with his plans.

We are so familiar with both the words, the stories and the courage, that it can be hard to tap into their emotional resonance. We find a hint of the anguish that Miriam must have experienced in her name, which literally means bitter, or mar. One harsh incident after another—a collection of notes in the minor key.

But for Miriam there is no cacophony of noise. There is no randomness in the maelstrom of her life. Even within the bitterness there is an awareness of a melody being formed. Each separate deed is strung together into a narrative: a theme threads through each life event. From darkness, redemption. From death, life. From distance, closeness. Every travail, every aspect of life come together to form a sharsheres, a necklace that adorns her. And these come together in the song that she sang at the yam suf—an explosion of joy that affirmed how every step of the journey, every single bead, is a testament to Hashem's involvement in our lives.

This is the dimension of Torah that is called shirah, song. There is the dimension of Eirubin and Kiddushin and Bava Kama. Of an intricate knowledge of halachos and poskim. And then there is a dimension that is specifically connected to women, and it is the Torah of emunah, faith. But this is no theoretical concept. It is not simply an intellectual understanding of Hashem's involvement in our lives. So, what is it?

A Chain of Events

Our lives are made up of countless individual events. A job offer. A move to a different neighborhood. A child's shidduch that did work out and a different child's shidduch that didn't work out. A child edging into the wrong crowd. Another child excelling in school. An argument. A moment of connection. A personal victory. A failure. A kaleidoscope of life events and circumstances, actions and reactions. It can be confusing. It can feel like we're simply treading water as life's waves bear down on us. We wonder if there's any connection between them, and if we're actually getting somewhere.

Shirah, song, is the ability to look into the ups and down of our personal journeys and form them into a meaningful narrative. Ah, this child taught me this—and then I was better prepared to handle that—and although I didn't react well to this, there's some lessons I've gained in the humility department—and the move brought me in touch with this person, to whom I could give and practice receiving... and on and on.

Shira enables us to string together the events of our lives to find expansiveness and strength and above all, ein od milvado—that we were put in specific situations and circumstances to acknowledge that all strength and all wisdom are from Hashem—and for Him, for us better to serve Him and reveal His oneness and unity. It's a song that's constantly changing, as the harmonies intertwine and the melody shifts

from a minor key to a major and then back to minor, only to build into a crescendo.

It is precisely the bitterness that Miriam experienced—incident after incident, bead after bead—that joined together to form the necklace—the sharsheres—that adorned her, and the song that she composed. There was nothing random about Miriam's life. Each aspect, each incident built on each other, followed each other, as part of a theme that sought to find the hand of Hashem. This was what brought her to song—that aspect of Torah that she bequeathed to every Jewish woman.

The dimension of Torah that is shirah is intensely personal. For it involves looking at the seemingly random events of our individual lives and starting to see a pattern. There may not be a single theme—a necklace can have many strands. But when we look at the ups and downs, the surprising turns and the reversals... all of these have taught me something. They've brought me to a certain place. They've grown me. That's when we link all our lives together into a necklace—or a song—that brings out Hashem's oneness. His divine plan.

The Light of Torah

Let's return to Shavuos.

On Shavuos, when Hashem gave us the gift of the Torah, He gave us the means to bring His presence into this physical world. Our eating

and talking, the way we dress and the way we behave all declare: I am here for a purpose. And that purpose is to make a home for Hashem in this physical world. In effect, it's an act of yichud, unification, for doing **so unites even the physical aspects of the world—the parts that seem very far away from spirituality—into vehicles for Hashem's malchus.**

To enable us to do this, Hashem gave us the Torah. The Arizal explains that every word of Torah is infused with Hashem's light. This light is so blinding and holy that we receive it in a wrapping—the Torah. By learning Torah, we are absorbing this light, which then opens us up to connecting and bonding with Hashem. **As we've learned, the feminine pathway is through the Torah of song.**

Thus every Shavuot, a special spiritual energy is manifest. It's called the midah of Keser, a crown. It is the power to bring unity—to the world, through the Torah, and within ourselves and our lives, through the dimension of shirah. On Shavuot, the light of Keser descends to the world. The Torah, the Shechinah makes its home among mankind.

The Gift of a Crown

One of the figures who features prominently during this time of year is Rebbi Akiva. There is the obvious connection to sefiras ha'omer. But there is a deeper connection, in that **Moshe Rabbeinu saw in Rebbi Akiva a figure worthy of bringing down Torah to klal Yisrael.**

When Rebbi Akiva returned home to his wife Rochel after 24 years in the beis midrash, he presented her with a golden crown. On the most obvious level, he was saying to her—the Keser Torah that I have earned is through you.

But there is another message that lies in the sparkling crown that adorned Rochel's head.

The life's path of Rebbi Akiva and Rochel was unusual and meandering. We know of Rebbi Akiva's humble beginnings, his animosity towards Torah Scholars and how Rochel detected in him the quality of tznius—a deep inwardness that marked him out as ripe for connection with Hashem.

Rochel's wealthy and prominent father disowned them and they lived in dire poverty, grateful for mere straw to sleep on. And then Rochel urged Rebbi Akiva to travel to the great center of Torah learning and immerse himself in Hashem's word.

It could be read as a litany of travail. It could be a narrative of suffering and sacrifice. But a theme ran through every event—transformation. A stone pierced by water. A heart shaped by Torah. A farmer who becomes a scholar. A privileged upbringing cast aside for higher ideals. All of these reflect the ultimate transformation: **man himself—physical and frail, lowly and limited can become a vehicle for Hashem's light, and bringing Torah into the world.**

This was an entirely different story. Rochel looked through the events of her life, and

threaded them together into a necklace of meaning and beauty. She found unity and oneness in the events of her life, in the twisting pathway that seemed to lead them off track, but were all taking them deliberately to their destiny.

The crown that Rebbi Akiva presented her hinted at her ability to relate to the heavenly midah of keser. Keser, as we stated above, corresponds to yichud or unity—finding and searching and discerning that everything is from Hashem. Discerning that all the world and all of life events are different forms of Hashem's Shechinah—often obscure, but always present. Crown. Crown signifies kingship, but more than that, it represents the unity which Torah—and which serving Hashem—can bring to the world.

No wonder that Rebbi Akiva bought his wife a Keser, a golden crown to place upon her head.

More than Cheesecake

Shavuos can feel easy for the menfolk: there is a clearly defined structure. There are expectations. There's a specific framework that enables them to connect. In contrast, women can feel left with a vague sense that they're missing out on the most important day of the year.

Interestingly, most of the practices on Shavuos are actually minhagim, not mitzvos. Shavuos is startlingly empty of specific do's and don't: there's no sukkah, no menorah, no shofar.

The reason for this hails back to matan Torah. When Hashem's presence descended on Har Sinai, there was no movement and no noise. Utter silence. All doing was halted. Shavuos was the ultimate experience of being.

On Shavuos we need do nothing more than bask in the bond we have with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We learn Torah not to finish a particular mesechta or master a set of halachos. We simply absorb His light. In fact, the tikkun leil Shavuos, which is comprised of the start and end of 24 books of Tanach is compared to the 24 adornments that a kallah wears to celebrate her marriage. As women, we simply need to step into a sphere of closeness, a place of emunah and joy. A place where we can faintly hear the melody composed by Miriam haneviah—and join with our unique harmony.

This Shavuos may we be zocheh to absorb Hashem's light and open our hearts and lips to the song of emunah. And in doing so, may we be worthy of not one crown, but two, placed upon our heads by the malachim themselves as we declare, Naaseh v'nishmah.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Faigie Zelcer

