

דע, כי יעקב אבינו, כִּשְׁשַׁלַּח אֶת בָּנָיו

The Shepherd's Melody

THE TEACHING

When Yaakov Avinu sent his sons, the ten tribes (שְׁבָטִים), to Yosef, he sent with them a melody (נְגִינָה) of the Land of Israel. This is the secret of “קָחוּ מִזְמֶרֶת הָאָרֶץ בְּכֵלֵיכֶם” (בראשית מג:יא), “take of the zimras of the land in your vessels”, and Rashi explains מִזְמֶרֶת as the language of song (זִמְרָה).

Every shepherd (רוֹעֶה) has his own melody, according to the grasses and the place where he grazes, because each animal needs its own grass. And every grass has a song (שִׁירָה) it says, as in Perek Shirah; from the song of the grasses the shepherd's melody is made.

MAIN POINTS

- So the Torah puts Yaval, the first herdsman, beside his brother Yuval, “אָבִי כָל תִּפְשׁ כְּנֹר וְעֹגֵב” (בראשית ד:כא), “the father of all who play the harp and flute”: as soon as there were shepherds, there were instruments. And David HaMelech, who knew how to play, was a shepherd.
- “מִכַּנְף הָאָרֶץ זְמִירוֹת שָׁמַעְנוּ” (ישעיהו כד:טז), “from the corner of the earth we heard songs”; and “הַנִּצְנָנִים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ, עַתָּה הַזְמִיר הִגִּיעַ” (שיר השירים ב:יב). Through the melody he knows, the shepherd gives strength to the grasses, and the flock has pasture.
- The melody also guards the shepherd. Always among animals, he could be drawn down from a human spirit to an animal spirit (רוּחַ הַבְּהֵמִיּוֹת), grazing only himself.
- Melody refines the spirit, sifting “רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הָעֹלָה הִיא לְמַעְלָה” (קהלת ג:כא), “the spirit of man that goes upward”, from the spirit of the animal that goes down.
- A king (מֶלֶךְ) holds the whole melody; each minister (שָׂר) only his part. So Daniel told Nevuchadnetzar: “וּמִזֶּן לְכֹלָא בֵּה” (דניאל ד:ט), “and food for all is in it”, for sustenance (מִזֶּן) comes through the melody.
- Hearing from his sons how this ruler behaved, Yaakov sent him the melody fitting such a ruler. The balm, honey, spices, pistachios and almonds were the weights and measures of that melody, for the melody grows from the land.

A PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY · OUR OWN REFLECTION

Creation is singing all around you. When you feel pulled down, sing, and let the melody lift your spirit. And know that your song can strengthen those who depend on you.

In the full shiur: 1. The Shepherd's Melody · 2. The Guarded Spirit, and the King's Whole Melody

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