



SCHECHTER

Shabbat Shira

Cantor Danielle Bensimhon
Congregation Bethaynu

Cantor Bensimhon of Congregation Bethaynu has recently joined our Middle School T'fillah team.

This Shabbat is Shabbat Shira, the Shabbat where we immerse ourselves in song. Why? Is it not enough to read about walking through the parted Red Sea and the ensuing celebration? Why should we, as Jews today, have to sing? Aside from reliving the experience as we are taught to do with the Passover seder, does song itself have power?

To answer this, we must take a look at one of the great sources of teaching: Sesame Street. In, "Sing a Song," we find many of the unique aspects of music and how it can heighten our prayer experience.

Sing, sing a song
Sing out loud, sing out strong

Each week in shul, we recite, more or less, the same prayers. We usually recite them in the same manner whether that's reading or chanting. Whatever it is, we tend to do it the same way. In doing so, prayers become habit. And this habit takes over the meaning of what we are saying. On Shabbat Shira, we are asked to do something different. Instead of mumbling our prayers and letting them fall out of our mouths down between the pews, this week we need to lift our heads and sing out the words of our heart. Break the habit. Set our prayers free to ascend to God.

Don't worry that it's not good enough
For anyone else to hear
Just sing, sing a song

Some people feel very self-conscious when singing. A similar thing happens when praying. Am I saying this the right way? Am I praying too fast? Too slow? Am I thinking the right thing when I reach out to God? Did the people around me notice I messed up a word? Does that mean the prayer doesn't count? Shabbat Shira lets us know that God wants to hear our voices. While we worry that, on top of all our usual concerns, we may be off key, when we sing our prayers, we offer up something greater than the sound that comes from our lips. We give to God the voice of our soul. This is the still, small voice we find on Yom Kippur when the shofar blast strips away the outer layers of our worldliness, leaving only our divine spirit to sing out, untarnished. This Shabbat, discover that voice within and let it burst forth. Apart from the sounds of our mouth, this message has a voice of its own. We each have our own means of expression, our own song. Some people prefer traditional melodies, others the personal appeal of [Carlebach](#). Some choose to make their own songs. What is most important though is that we all have our own song to

sing. It may be hidden away, deep inside. Shabbat Shira calls to it, asking for it to be set free.

**Sing, sing a song
Let the world sing along
Sing of what there could be
Sing for you and for me**

Song is a gateway to spirituality. As we sing, we feel each other's vibrations. We become aware of our own bodies and ourselves in relation to those around us. We move with the beat. Perhaps we close our eyes or dance. We are aware. We join our energies. Our prayer is more alive and carries with it a heightened kavanah or intention. As many of you know, this week saw the passing of [Debbie Friedman](#) (z"l). Debbie Friedman dedicated her life to bringing Jews together in song. She knew the power of many voices joining to become one. To do this, she had to find a form of prayer that every individual could access. Sometimes she used English, sometimes Hebrew. All the time though there was music. There had to be something for everyone. That is because the world we want to build should have something for everyone. Everyone should belong. Everyone should feel God's presence. When we sing together on Shabbat Shira, we tell God our innermost hopes and dreams and ask them to come true.

This week, when we pray, may our thoughts dwell on Miriam and the Israelites as they sang and danced their way across the Red Sea. May we too feel the miracle of God's presence. May our own voices rise out of us and ascend. Together, let us help each other connect and soar.

Just sing, sing a song