Rav Kook on T'hilim

from an unpublished work
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T'hilim 30 - Melody and Song

Summary: As we enter a house of prayer, we should aspire to the ideal of Mizmor Shir: to fully utilize both our emotional and intellectual capacities for praise and joy.

P'sukei d'Zimra, the preliminary selection of psalms which introduces the morning prayers, opens with the words, Mizmor Shir:

A melody (MIZMOR), a song (SHIR), for the Temple inauguration, to David. (Psalm 30:1)

What is the difference between a MIZMOR and a SHIR? Why is this phrase appropriate for our daily initiation into prayer? And what is the connection to the Temple dedication?

Emotion and Intellect

Heartfelt emotion, emanating from the depths of the soul, lies hidden in the crevices of life. When these feelings burst forth, we do not immediately render them into words and speech. Without thinking, we may find ourselves humming a lively tune. We give voice to our emotions through ZEMER, in the notes of a melody or wordless tune. This is MIZMOR, the musical outpouring of the soul.

As our feelings expand and reveal themselves, they engage the world of reflection and thought, gaining access to the treasures of language and speech. This is the level of SHIR, of song and poetry. We can now articulate this outburst of emotion using our cognitive faculties of reason and language.

When we join MIZMOR and SHIR together, we link our emotional and intellectual sides. First appears MIZMOR, a musical outpouring from the emotional depths of the soul. This is joined by SHIR, poetic expression based on holy meditation and reflection.

As we enter our house of prayer, we need to aspire to the sublime ideal of MIZMOR SHIR. We should fully utilize both our emotional and intellectual capacities for praise and joy.

These two faculties achieved their highest expression when the place most suitable for spiritual elevation was completed – at the dedication of the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem. "A melody! A song! For the Temple inauguration!"

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