



Shabbat Nitzanim-Vayelech/24 Elul 5777
September 15, 2017

Dear Shir Tikvah:

It's the end of 5777 and I find myself surrounded by music. Every surface of my office is covered with sheet music. Choral and chant and protest music. The music cannot - or will not - be contained.

It's the end of 5777 and I find myself each day with people singing and playing their hearts out. From the newly formed Kids Band at Hebrew School, where four young people boldly lead our community in prayer on their cello, drum and guitars; to rehearsals with choir and ensemble, every day at Shir Tikvah finds another group of people pouring their hearts out in song.

It's the end of 5777 and I'm finding myself moved to tears on the daily, amazed by the generosity and the openness, by the sheer artistry and delight, with which community members are bringing this music to life.

These days bring to mind a favorite text by the Piaseczner Rebbe, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, who wrote and taught in the Warsaw Ghetto. It's a text that I return to again and again, and that I love sharing because of the way that the Piaseczner Rebbe so completely loves and trusts how music uplifts prayer:

Taking a part of a niggun you know, turn yourself to face the wall, or just close your eyes, and think that you are standing before the Throne of Glory [on which God sits], and with your heart broken you have come to pour out your soul to God, with song and melody which come from the innermost part of your heart. Then you will certainly feel that your soul is coming out as you sing. If at first you were singing slowly before your soul in order to arouse it from its sleep, slowly, slowly you will feel that your soul has begun to sing on its own...

We are not singing simply because it feels good or because the music is beautiful, the Piaseczner reminds us. Our souls' music has the power to lift us up from where we are stuck and help us enter the new year with openness and resilience.

On Saturday night, we will have the chance to sing, to learn, and share as we prepare for our High Holy Days at our S'lichot service. I look forward to pouring our voices out, in supplication, in yearning, in hope. Maybe it will take some time, but I wish for each of us that even for a moment during this High Holy Day season, our souls might begin to sing on their own.

It's the end of 5777 and I look forward to a new year of courageous prayer, learning and action with you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Arielle Rosenberg