

Shabbat Parashat B'Shalah/Shabbat Shira /Pre-Tu Bish'vat  
Sing a Song for Shabbat

“The whole world is waiting to sing a song of Shabbat.”

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Shabbat on which we read *parashat* B'shalah is always also named *Shabbat Shira*/The Shabbat of the Song because it is the Shabbat on which we read The Song of the Sea, the biblical poem which recounts how God miraculously and finally defeated the Egyptians and freed the Israelite slaves. After crossing the Reed (yes, Reed, not Red) Sea, the Israelites burst into song and dance, led by Miriam and the women, to celebrate their newfound independence. Praising God and celebrating life through song, therefore, have a very long and rich history and tradition in Judaism, and this is the Shabbat on which we are supposed to remember and become recommitted to them.

Each week during Kabbalat Shabbat services in school, our students welcome in the spirit of Shabbat with blessings, prayers, and song. Over the last few years, we have been adding in new prayers and songs, both traditional and more contemporary. One of the newer texts that we have been doing is a melody for the Psalm for Shabbat. That same tune was adapted and applied to the quotation above, which I am told was sung by Abraham Joshua Heschel each week on *Erev Shabbat*/Friday evening. The melody is slow and can be very successful at getting an individual or a group into the “Shabbat spirit.” Children in Grade 2 and up should certainly be familiar with the melody, so please ask them to teach it to the family, if you are interested (They will know the melody as “*mizmor shir l'Yom haShabbat*.” The power of the message of the song is that all week long, we work, stay busy, and rush around. However, we should all also be waiting for and anticipating the respite of Shabbat, during which we are supposed to take time to sing and revel in peace and rest. One of the ways that we do so is through song at the end of long and leisurely Shabbat family meals. Not only does music and singing enliven a Shabbat prayer service in the synagogue, but it also does wonders for a Shabbat meal. Imagine what a difference it would make to join together as a family to sing one, two, or several Shabbat songs at the end of a Shabbat meal. That could certainly be a way to enhance your family's experience of Shabbat around the table either on Friday night or Shabbat afternoon, or both.

Thankfully, our community produces many song books that contain songs on many Jewish themes, mostly about Shabbat and the glory of the State of Israel. My personal preference is the B'Kol Eched, a publication of the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism because of its vast selection of songs, clear print, inclusion of transliterated Hebrew and translation, and a full and abbreviated version of Birkat HaMazon/The Blessing after Meals. If you do not have song books in your home, I highly recommend purchasing a set for your family's use on Shabbat and festivals. You may like to search for other options at on-line bookstores to find the songbook which best fits your family's needs. I have also located a couple of websites to help you learn the melodies for the songs. Of course, one would not be able to visit these sites on Shabbat, but it would be a nice idea as a family-wide Shabbat preparation activity.

[http://www.usy.org/songs/browse\\_songs.php](http://www.usy.org/songs/browse_songs.php)

<http://www.aish.com/shabbatsongs/>

We must also not forget that Shabbat this week is only a few short days before Tu Bish'vat on next Thursday. So, as we celebrate Shabbat, we could also remember the “New Year of the Trees.” Conveniently, there are several songs that are popular for Tu Bish'vat. I have included the lyrics for

the most famous one below and an on-line link to several other options as well. In addition to singing traditional Tu Bishvat songs, please consider purchasing a tree to be planted in Israel by the JNF. Your children brought their tree envelopes home this week. Every individual tree planted makes a huge difference in greening the State of Israel and making it more ecologically sustainable. It is a gift that will last generations!

## *HASH'KEIDIYAH PORAHAT*

*Hash'keidiyah porahat  
veshemesh paz zorachat,  
tziporim merosh kol gag  
mevasrot et bo hechag.*

*T"u bish'vat higi'a  
hag la'ilanot.  
T"u bish'vat higi'a  
hag la'ilanot.*

Tu Bish'vat songs: <http://www.hebrewsongs.com/tubishvat.htm>

On this Shabbat, *Shabbat Shira*/'The Shabbat of Song, I wish you all a melodious Shabbat Shalom of song and rejoicing!