

**January 18, 2008**

*Dear Friends,*

*On this Shabbat Shirah, the Sabbath of Song, the Torah reading includes the chanting of the song the Israelites sang after crossing the sea and escaping the Egyptians' pursuit. The Haftarah reading contains the song of Deborah, one of the judges (an inspired leader) in the Bible, which she intoned after a military victory. The Bible mentions other songs and there is, of course, the book of Psalms that was likely sung with musical accompaniment.*

*What is the role of music in a community? In my recently published songbook, I explained that "music has the potential to illuminate the ideas, emotions and lessons embodied in Jewish texts....Favorite Jewish songs become a part of congregational culture and a foundation for personal spirituality."*

*One of the weekly Torah commentaries I receive quoted Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch, a 19th Century leader of Orthodox Judaism, who defined song as "an inspired or rapturous expression of what some external event has revealed to the inner self, that which the physical eye cannot see, but what has become clear to the mind's eye".*

*I would add to Rabbi Hirsch's statement, "what has become clear to the 'eye of the soul.'" Song emerges from an overflow of emotion and a resulting interplay of words, rhythm and melody as well as chords and harmony. Song might seem to emerge "out of nowhere" and rapidly reach completion. It also might be the final expression of thoughts and feelings that took days, months or years to come together in just the right way.*

*These definitions and reflections on music apply not only to the songs we sing during worship but to any music that we prefer and enjoy. Chances are that we like some music based on the old "American Bandstand" standard of "it's has a good beat and you can dance to it!" Otherwise, it may be that we hear an echo of our own souls and our own lives in the lyrics and melodies to which we listen the most (whether on records, CDs, or digital music players).*

*Each of us adds to the special spirit of our community when we appreciate the music we hear and when we join together in song. Throughout every week, may we find the melodic inspiration we need to nourish our souls along the path of life!*

**-- L'shalom,  
Rabbi Larry K.**