

Soulful Singing: Song as Connection

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SUMMARY: Join us for lots of low-key singing in community (all voices welcome!) interspersed with some text, mindfulness, and other insights into the power of this practice.

GOALS:

- Connect with one another through the singing of traditional and new melodies.
- To explore the power of singing as a means of group connection.
- To empower Cornerstone participants to facilitate their own niggun circle and/or group singing at their own camps.

AUDIENCE: All are welcome; best for a group of up to 50ish people

TIMING: 75 minutes

MATERIALS: Stories and sources below

SESSION TIMELINE

00:00-00:05 – *Opening Niggun*

00:05-00:10 – *Introductions, setting group norms*

00:10-00:48 – *Niggun singing, stories, and meditation*

00:48-01:05 – *“Pull back the curtain” and participant share*

01:05-01:15 – *Debrief and closing niggun*

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:05 – Opening Niggun

As folks are coming in, leaders are singing a niggun with one leader (while singing) showing folks where to sit and motioning to them that they should come in and begin singing. Other leaders will be seated in the circle singing.

00:05-00:10 – Introductions, setting group norms

Once the niggun ends, leaders will let the energy sit for a moment in the silence of the circle.

Leaders will introduce themselves and present the opening question and discussion. Opening question: Where does group singing take place at your camps?

After a few participants have shared aloud, take the time to introduce the type of singing circle which has commenced. This includes singing niggunim, sharing stories, meditation, and sitting in silence.

Define the word niggun as a “wordless melody,” which serves multiple roles in communal singing. Sometimes niggunim can speak louder than words and emotions, while serving as an entry point to singing where anyone can join without knowing the words to the song. Often, niggunim and group singing do not need instrumentation.

Explain that for the next hour or so, we will lead the group in the singing of niggunim, the telling of stories and sharing of words of Torah. In that time, you can sing along and take a break to listen to the singing around you. When our singing has come to an end, we will share some of the ways that we felt and participated, so if you notice a feeling or something interesting, hold on to it so we can share at the end!

00:10-01:05 – Niggun singing, stories, and meditation

00:10-00:22 Complex quiet energy niggun

00:22-00:36 Meditative (simple) niggun

00:36-00:48 Complex high energy niggun

00:48-01:15 – Shift into debrief, participant experimentation and closing

00:48-00:55 Quick unpacking of how to teach/lead a niggun (Benjamin)

00:55-1:05 Participants lead niggunim

01:05-1:10 Debrief in pairs (Sarrah)

1:10-1:15 Closing niggun

Stories and Sources:

[סנהדרין צ"ט א:כ"ג-צ"ט ב:א'](#)

רבי עקיבא אומר: זמר בכל יום זמר בכל יום אמר רב יצחק בר אבודימי מאי קרא שנאמר (משלי טז, כו) נפש עמל עמלה לו כי אכף עליו פיהו הוא עמל במקום זה ותורתו עומלת לו במקום אחר.

[Sanhedrin 99a:23-99b:1](#)

Rabbi Akiva says: Sing every day, sing every day, i.e., review your studies like a song that one sings over and over. Rav Yitzhak bar Avudimi says: From what verse is this derived? It is as it is stated: “The hunger of the laborer labors for him; for his mouth presses upon him” (Proverbs 16:26), i.e., he exhausts his mouth through constant review and study. He labors in Torah in this place, this world, and his Torah labors for him in another place, the World-to-Come.

[רש"י על סנהדרין צ"ט ב:א:א'](#)

זמר בכל יום - היה מסדר למודך אע"פ שסדור בפ"ך כזמר והוא יגרום לך שתהא לעולם הבא בשמחה ובשירים

[Rashi on Sanhedrin 99b:1:1](#)

Sing every day - Even if one has reviewed his learning, he should sing it every day, and this will cause your life in the World to Come to be with happiness and songs.

The Mystical Power of Music by Avraham Aryeh Trugman (pg.41)

"Music, perhaps more than any other medium, has the unique ability to express and mirror the full range of human emotions, consciousness, and experience. Its appeal on one hand is universal, transcending race, religion, culture, and era, while on the other hand nothing captures the particular essence of a specific culture, religion, era or individual better than music. It allowed the soul to soar to heavenly heights, giving wing to man's most glorious aspirations and dreams. It expresses as well man's greatest pain, sadness, and existential loneliness.

R' Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, from *Davening: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Prayer*

Repetition is important. The aim is not just to run through the niggun a couple of times but to let it build -- '**soaking in the niggun** (*er veykt zach in dem niggun*),' we used to say. Body language is important, too. Even if you are just singing on your own, get your body involved. Beat time on the table or your knee. Close your eyes. Sway back and forth if you can. Tell your body where you want to go, and let your body help communicate this to the rest of you. The Baal Shem Tov would sometimes ask his followers to put a hand on the shoulder of the person next to them as they sang. Forming a physical circle, he believed, would actualize the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself...

We are not merely singing melodies -- this is the point. A *niggun* is a path to God, a 'song of ascension.'... We must travel with that intention in mind... Get together with friends, tell stories, swap songs. Soak in the *niggunim*. See how far they can take you.

CORNERSTONE RESOURCE

