

# This Singing World

*Rabbi Will Berkovitz*

When I was five years old I lost my favorite tooth – the one with the filling in the front, I carefully wrapped it in a sheet of piece of Kleenex, eased it under my pillow and expectantly drifted off to sleep. The next morning to my horror all I found was Lincoln’s copper face meekly peering up at me.. I wanted to protest, file a letter of complaint to the tooth-fairies superiors. That had been, after all, my favorite tooth – the one with the filling in the front.

I had yet to crawl out of bed and already it was shaping up to be a very bad day. But then something unexpected happened. Before my foot hit the floor I noticed another penny where I was preparing to set my size 3 foot. And then another next to that. And a forth and a fifth. My eyes widened in wonder. Hopping out of bed I followed a trail of shiny copper pennies snaking their way down the hall up the windowsill and out along the ground in our back yard.

Upon showing my father my amazing boon he explained the tooth fairy must have had a hole in her bag, but according to an obscure reference in the Fairy Code of law any pennies left behind become the soul property of the child who finds them. In other words these pennies were mine free and clean, with the full power of the Ferry judicial system to back me up. I recall

asking my father if my grandmother who was also losing teeth put them under her pillow for the tooth fairy. He said he did not think so.

As the years progressed and the last of my permanent teeth took their respective places I forgot about the tooth fairy and most of the other wondrous things of my childhood. But having recently become a new father I find myself once again turning to simple childhood joys.

In addition to reading to me from Tooth Ferry legal code, my father also read to me from a book of poetry called, “This Singing World.” The goal of the editor was similar to my father’s – to plant a seed of wonder in my soul that would continue to grow. That goal is one we should foster not only in our children, but also within ourselves and within our community. One of the central themes of the Jewish tradition is revealing a world of mystery that is filled with wonder and joy – a world where every corner of life harbors the footprints of God, and the splendor of possibility. Ours is a tradition that revels in the immense grandeur of living.

Despite what we may be led to believe, perhaps our God is not a creator who wants to sit in perpetual judgment over humans and our imperfections. Is it possible ours is a God who wants to be entertained and wants us to live lives not in eternal fear of punishment but in joyful exuberance? If you do not believe me just take a look at the platypus or consider the sloth and the hippopotamus. Would an angry, judgmental God create the platypus and the sloth? Or are those the works of a slightly eccentric Inventor.

According to the Rabbis one of the first things we will be asked upon our death will not be to justify all of our minor transgressions but rather, “Did you enjoy the splendor of my creation?” It is not that there is nothing new under the sun. Rather we need to realize that there is nothing old under the sun. The Hebrew word for to hide L’halem, shares a common shoresh, root with the words world, olam, and the word elem, which means sapling, youth or alternatively mute. The very language of the Torah hints that there is more than meets the eye. Hidden within the sapling is the potential of the tree. And we are left mute or blind if we do not pause to recognize it. Our very world Olam is a smokescreen hiding another world. In this way each day can be filled with the infinite possibility of new discovery.

God is asking us not to lazily sit back and expect every miracle to be as tectonic as the splitting of the sea. Let us not forget that the entire adventure of the Jewish people began with Moses realizing there was something unusual about a shrub smoldering in the desert. God did not choose to appear to Moses in a fiery redwood, but a burning bush. We are taught that the bush was burning from the beginning of creation. How many others passed by without taking notice. Moses turned aside. We are his descendants -- the inheritors of a tradition that not only hears God’s shouts across the rooftops of the world but also the whispers of the still small voice. Our inheritance is a legacy of wonder.

As Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, “Wonder or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious man’s attitude toward history and nature.” It is wonder and not knowledge that is the root of all wisdom. Among the chief aims of the mitzvot and Jewish prayer is honing our

sensitivities so we may come closer to the world of the psalmists and the prophets – delighting with those who live in awe. Those who see Divine footprints in the shimmering of the setting sun and hear in the desert silence the humming of the spheres.

My prayer for us is that we will strive to see the world as a spiritual scavenger hunt and be willing to seek out the little copper pennies that the Divine Creator has scattered along the paths of our lives. They are not always in plain view sometimes they require a little digging, and although at first they may not seem insignificant they are infinitely precious.

Shabbat Shalom.