

In an essay “Omeq Simchas Purim – Zamru Maskil” that was published in “Mevakshei Torah”, Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon quotes R’Shlomo Alkabetz, the author of Lecha Dodi, who conveys this idea beautifully. In Manos Levi on Megillah, R’ Alkabetz asks: Why didn’t Achashveirosh provide any temptations for the sense of hearing at the party described in the beginning of Megilas Esther? He provided temptations for all of the other senses; smell – scents from the garden; sight – beautiful tapestries to see; touch; luxurious gold and silver beds; and taste – “Yayn malchus rav.” Why didn’t he provide music to tempt the sense of hearing?



R’ Shlomo Alkabetz explains that a nigun is tremendously powerful. It can raise man’s soul to dveykus. He writes that the angels communicate through shira; the nigun is the language of heaven. In fact, he writes that that’s why babies feel comfortable when we sing to them, because it reminds their neshamos of shamayim where they were just recently listening to the angel’s shira.

Based on this, he answers that Achashveirosh’s intention at the party was to use the senses to entice the Jews to sin, and he was afraid to have music at the party because then they might have been spiritually uplifted by the music, enabling them to transcend their surroundings and avoid succumbing to temptation.

R’ Salomon asks: The Nesivos (in Megilas Sesarim) explains that Achashveirosh’s intent was that each thing would incur a direct violation, for example, he had prostitutes there to tempt the people, so why didn’t he have musician’s playing erotic music? We all know the power of music in being moshech people to ta’avah.

To answer, he quotes “Zaken Echad” (based on Radak) who says that we’ll never totally understand Tehillim until we understand the musical instructions and instruments assigned to each piece. The power of a nigun is to add “hesber v’havana b’dakus hadevarim.” To this point, the Meiri explains the pasuk of “Zamru maskil”; that singing gives insight. However, it only gives insight, or is meorer that which is hidden in our hearts and souls. In other words, R’ Salomon feels, a nigun is neither tameh nor kadosh, rather the tune is meorer what’s in one’s heart. Even if a given tune is meorer some to ta’avah, nevertheless, the same tune can bring an Ish Kodesh to dveykus.

This answers R’ Salomon’s question. Achashveirosh didn’t have music at the party because he knew that its possible to find the kedusha in any melody, so the music might actually have had the opposite effect of inspiring the Jews to do teshuva.

The obvious conclusion – even coarse secular music – presumably what Achashveirosh would have had playing – can be used to grow spiritually.

Incidentally, in this essay, R’ Salomon protests today’s Jewish pop music; he says that it’s commercial—designed to hook people and get them into it. He says that the “star” mentality of promoting the individual entertainers is abhorrent and that certainly most of them aren’t worthy of being role models.