



Dobby Baum
gives
women
a voice
through
song

AS TOLD TO DEVORIE KREIMAN BY DOBBY BAUM



Can you hear my voice
It's raised in song
I want to serve You...
And I know all that I do
Means nothing without You.
The artist breakthrough...



Artist Prayer

COMPOSED BY DOBBY BAUM

LYRICS BY CHAVA ROSENBAUM AND GITTY FRIEDMAN

raised voice. In song. In *tefillah*. Even before I knew the power of raising my own voice, I was drawn to sound. I'm the youngest of ten children. As a baby, I couldn't fall asleep in a quiet room. My mother would wheel my Silver Cross carriage into the kitchen where my siblings were eating and talking, and surrounded by the ruckus I would fall asleep. When I was a toddler in playgroup, the teachers complained that I was too loud and my mother was told to place me in a more advanced class, so I became one of the youngest. Most of my siblings were shy as children and hesitated to speak up in public. Not I! At the age of four I had my first on-stage solo. To my parents' delight, I was pitch perfect.

I grew up in London in a family of Gerer *chasidim*. My parents are both children of Holocaust survivors. After their wedding, they didn't have children for two and a half years. Every Rosh Chodesh, my father hosted a *chaburah* in our home and my mother cooked an elaborate meal for them. Once, one of the men came into the kitchen, looked at the spotless counters and the food neatly laid out and gave my mother a *brachah*: "One day your house will get messy from children."

My mother had ten children and the house became messy. I used to joke that being the youngest came with many perks—except on Shabbos, when my father gave out the slices of challah and I had to wait and wait for my turn.

My father learned full time. We lived in Stamford Hill until I was seven and my father was asked to become the *rosh kollel* in Edgware, which is about an hour by train from Stamford Hill. Today, Edgware has *shuls*, schools and kosher restaurants, but when we moved there in 2003, the community was mostly non-observant Jews and *baalei teshuvah*. I continued to go to school in Stamford Hill after we moved, but I felt like an out-of-towner because of the long commute. I was known as "the girl from Edgware."

My mother is a dressmaker. Her specialty is high-end dresses and wedding gowns. She would sometimes stay up all night sewing beading onto a gown. She created her own patterns and sewed a lot of the clothes that we wore. In our home in Edgware, one wall of the dining room is lined with shelves of *sefarim* and the other has my mother's sewing table, a mannequin and a curtained-off dressing room. My mother put in an accordion door as a partition so my father can learn while she meets with clients.

As a *kollel* family we lived simply, but we didn't feel deprived. My mother

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Sing - take this time

Sing - feel alive

Sing - we gotta try

It just feels so right

Sing - when joy finds you

Sing - when trouble blinds

Sing - you are special

See you can shine too

SING!

COMPOSED BY P.B.
LYRICS BY SURY FREUDENBERGER



baked an abundance of cakes and cookies, and our home always smelled delicious. My friends loved spending time there. As children, my siblings and I knew that if we wanted extras, we had to work and pay for them ourselves. I was innovative and hard working. I ran a successful day camp in my parents' house every winter and summer break from the time I was ten years old. I made flyers to advertise and did baking, arts and crafts and activities in our dining room with the kids. I used the money I earned to pay for many things, including a piano.

I was always drawn to music. Before I used words, I responded to melody. I consider it my first language. As I got older, I began to appreciate songs that told stories like Mordechai Ben David's songs in English. Sometimes new tunes would come into my head; I was too young to understand that I was composing.

I became an aunt when I was two years old. My nieces and nephews spent a lot of time in our house, and I became the willing babysitter. When we moved to Edgware, my married siblings stayed behind. I missed the noise and busyness that had filled our home in Stamford Hill. My mother saw that I was lonely, so every Chanukah she arranged for a bus to pick up my 43 classmates from Stamford Hill and bring them to our house for a party; this went on until I finished elementary school. I was in charge of the entertainment. I wrote a script for a Chanukah play, assigned parts to everyone, and we performed for my mother.

When I was 12 years old, my four-year-old niece developed complications from a strep infection and was placed on life support in the intensive care unit. She was hospitalized for months and I stayed with her in the hospital.

Normally, the hospital staff wouldn't allow a 12-year-old to stay in the ICU, but I looked and sounded much older, and they welcomed me and answered all my questions. I did the day shift, all day, every day. In the evening, a family member took over for the night, and I went home and completed the packets of schoolwork that my teachers sent me.

As I watched the doctors and nurses at work, I became interested in medicine and began to dream about being a doctor. I read science textbooks the way my friends read novels—one after the other, straight through. My mother nicknamed me "Dr. Dob."

I knew that music would always be a major part of my life. But I wondered: Could I dedicate myself to both music and medicine?

My mother arranged music lessons for me—another benefit of being the youngest and more indulged than the others. I learned both sight reading and how to play by ear. Both of my parents are musical. My father has a strong, rich voice, and the Shabbos *zemiro*s in our house are very powerful. My mother was known for her exquisite voice when she was a schoolgirl. Unfortunately, when she was 13 years old she went to summer camp where she was the kid who cheered the loudest, and in the process she damaged her vocal cords. My mother made sure that I learned how to breathe properly when I sang, and she warned me not to lose my voice by screaming as she did. I have never heard my mother sing.

I began to perform in community shows as a teenager. At the age of 13, I had one of the leading roles in the Bais Yaakov play in Stamford Hill and in our own school play. I performed in nursing homes and at memorials, parties and *tzedakah* fundraisers. Some of them had audiences of over

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1,000 women. I was often up all night practicing in addition to completing my homework, studying and commuting an hour each way to get to school and back.

My mother paid for my weekly lessons playing the piano by ear. I paid for additional weekly lessons playing from sheet music. While still in high school, I enrolled in the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, ABRSM. I took eight levels of exams, including one in which the examiner played a melody on the piano and I had to instantly memorize it. I earned a Certification in Practical Musicianship.

I graduated from high school the month I turned 16 and went to seminary in Manchester for the next two years. The seminary had a piano in the dining room, and I gave piano lessons to the other girls. I charged £7 for half an hour and had around 20 students every week. I also continued to take piano lessons in Manchester with a local teacher. I never stopped training. To this day, I still take voice lessons. There’s always more to learn.

I thrive when I’m busy. After seminary, I was “on” all the time. I performed in many venues and ran events to raise money for *tzedakah* organizations while teaching biology and math at three *frum* high schools in Stamford Hill, where I was barely two years older than some of my students.

I met my husband in 2015. We spoke for the first time at our *besheva*. He too loves to sing and composes his own music, but he doesn’t perform. He’s an American. Although we spoke the same language, we had some comic miscommunications. For example, when we had only been married a few days I asked my husband to “Please bring me a black sack.” He went into the bedroom and opened a drawer. I was so confused when he came back—



looking just as confused as I felt—with a black sock. I had to explain that a black sack is a garbage bag.

Our plan was to move to America shortly after our wedding. I had mixed feelings about this. I was used to London and comfortable in the bubble that was Stamford Hill and the many opportunities I was getting to perform there. America was far from family. America was vast. But America was also exciting.

I sold my piano in London and ordered a new one from Yamaha; it was delivered to our apartment in Flatbush on the day we arrived in the US. We had no other furniture, but we had a piano because that was how I was able to feel what I needed to feel, and I couldn’t be without one.

In America, I felt lost. I remember wandering around a grocery store on 18th Avenue overwhelmed and wondering how I would manage. Everyone else seemed to belong. I was the outsider. In Stamford Hill I had been busy performing, teaching and organizing. More importantly, in Stamford Hill everyone knew Dobby Schwarcz. In America, I knew no one and no one knew me.

Please guide and
navigate,
Bless the work I do,
Let all I create,
Bring honor to You,
I’ve chosen this life cuz I
know it’s
in my fate...



A song comes my way,
Soothing melody,
So much I wanna say
And just set it free,
I’ve chosen this life. It’s
a higher calling & sway

Artist’s Prayer

COMPOSED BY DOBBY BAUM
LYRICS BY CHAVA ROSENBAUM
AND GITTY FRIEDMAN



Same heartbreak every day,
Waiting to feel okay
Feel lost in every way
How will I go on?
Hashem, please take my hand,
Even though it's what You've planned...



Shomer Yisrael
COMPOSED AND LYRICS BY DOBBY BAUM

Hashem opens doors. Two days after we landed in America, my mother-in-law found me a job as a substitute sixth-grade teacher for someone on maternity leave. I led the students in performing *The Wizard of Oz*. I also got a job as a music director at a camp. And a friend’s mother hired me to sing at a birthday party, where someone else heard me and booked me to perform at her family’s Chanukah party, where someone else then approached me... Soon I was showing up with my mic, speaker and keyboard and singing in a lot of dining rooms. One event brought another in its wake, small gigs at first but then bigger and more elaborate ones.

I have stage fright. I know that’s hard to believe because I spend so much time on stage, but the truth is that my stage fright keeps me grounded. It’s humbling. I’m not a celebrity. I’m a human being who was born with a gift and feels the need to share it to inspire others. My song “The Artist’s Prayer” expresses my determination to use my talent in a holy way. It’s a *tefillah* to Hashem to guide my singing career as a *frum* woman.

When I was expecting my first child, I suffered from hyperemesis gravidarum. The nausea was overwhelming. The only food I kept down was white bread. I was terrified that I was depriving my baby of nutrition. I pushed myself to function. I set up a small recording studio in my apartment and gave voice and music lessons. Word spread, and soon I had around 36 students a week. My son was born in January 2017. By then I’d made many connections in the musical world and my career picked up. My husband took a job as a *rebbe* in *cheder* and we moved to Boro Park.

I created a video in which I sang “*Shema*.” The video tells the story of the rabbi who called out the *Shema* to find the Jewish children who were living in a convent during the Holocaust. I dedicated the video to all four of my

grandparents who went through the Holocaust and especially my grandfather who survived Auschwitz. My firstborn, Shragee, is named after him. I’d seen the numbers on his arm. When I was small, he would say *Shema* with me every night and then give me ten pence, which I used to buy a sour belt in the grocery store. He said *Shema* with great passion and it made a deep impression on me.

I’d always loved listening to choirs like Yigal Calek’s London Boys Choir. There’s a richness to the music when a choir backs a singer. In 2018, I formed the Brooklyn Girls Choir. I advertised in local magazines and held auditions for high school girls. I chose 11 of them, all Bais Yaakov-type girls from different neighborhoods in Brooklyn. The girls were Chabad, Litvish and *chasidish*. None of them had known each other. My goal was to produce a CD in which I would sing and the choir would back me up. It

was exhilarating to work with teens. I would often cook dinner for them and we worked around the clock. The girls in the choir became very close to each other and to me. Our “Brooklyn Girls Choir” album was released in 2019. It was sold in Judaica and music stores and it was a big hit. I continued to perform in plays and concerts.

When I was in the late stages of pregnancy with my second child, I started to feel “on edge.” I had heart palpitations and my blood pressure rose dangerously. My doctor sent me to the hospital, where I was told they were concerned that something was wrong with my heart. I blacked out in the middle of all of this and woke up on oxygen and surrounded by doctors. I stayed in the hospital for a few days because the doctors weren’t sure what was wrong. My husband composed the song “*Refaeinu*” that he sang at my

bedside. The song is included in my new album *Hero*.

The doctors ran many tests. They all came back okay for me and for the baby. They concluded that I'd had a panic attack. I was so relieved. They gave me some medication for short-term relief of my symptoms and sent me home. My daughter was born two weeks later.

I assumed that the panic attack was over. A one-time fright that I could put behind me.

I was wrong.

When my daughter was ten months old I had another severe panic attack. This time it didn't go away.

The panic attacks changed my life. I realized what I was up against and felt so out of control. I had to work out a long-term treatment plan. My panic attacks forced me to accept that I wasn't in charge. That was the first step to my healing. I realized that it was my body's way of letting me know that I had taken on too much. I canceled some commitments and reached out for help.

I still have ongoing therapeutic support to deal with this. I know that it's difficult or embarrassing for some people to talk about mental health. I too was hesitant to share my struggles at first. But I've learned how important it is to let people know that they're not alone and that support exists. Last year I partnered with an international organization that helps people deal with mental health challenges. At a concert in Stamford Hill, I spoke publicly about what happened to me and encouraged anyone struggling with anxiety or other mental health disorders to reach out to family and friends and get help.

In 2021 I discontinued the Brooklyn Girls Choir in order to focus all my energies on a single musical path. I travel throughout the US and abroad to perform. I encourage the women in the audience to sing along with me. At a concert in Monsey, as I walked through the crowd with my mic, a woman sang with me. Then she said, "This is the first time I've used my voice in many years. I thought when I got married that I wouldn't use my voice anymore."

Whenever I'm having a hard time I sit at the piano and play and sing. Only a small fraction of my songs has been released. The process of creating music just for the sake of hearing it is healing. As I play and sing, my pain and fear fade. It is how I know—clearly—that music is what I was born to do.

I also go to Manhattan and sing to patients in the hospitals. One woman couldn't speak, but her husband asked me to sing Shabbos *zemiro*s to her. I sang *zemiro*s at her bedside. I saw her eyes; they shone. I became very emotional. I always leave the hospitals feeling

Every day as I stand on the sidelines

Too afraid to let this be my time

Looking at myself unsure

Ohhh

Insecure to look at my reflection

Filled with doubt and rejection

Push aside the fear

Cuz I belong right here

I know I am worthy

Stand proud, this is who I'm meant to be

Here I am

I am breaking free...

Stand up with confidence

For who you are

You were created by the One

You are beautiful

The way you are

Beautiful

COMPOSED AND LYRICS BY ESTEE ROSENBERG
CREATIVE CONCEPT BY DOBBY BAUM



FULL
PAGE

grateful to be alive and healthy, thanking Hashem that I'm able to offer comfort to others in pain.

After my daughter was born, I started to gain weight. By the time she was a year old I'd gained 100 pounds. I was horrified. I'd worn a size Extra Small for many years. Shopping had been a pleasure; I looked good in every style. Then suddenly I was so big that I barely recognized myself.

I kept asking myself why. How did I go from thin to fat and ugly? The weight gain was unrelated to food. I've never had a big appetite and I don't overeat. It was my body reacting to what I was going through. My clothes were a size 3X and I hid whenever someone came near me with a camera.

When I was at my largest, someone said to me, "You shouldn't be performing like this. Lose some weight and then go back on stage." Another time, I was in a shoe store in Brooklyn and the saleswoman said, "Don't try on the shoes because you're going to stretch them." When I went into clothing stores, they said things like, "We don't sell anything for your women your age. We cater to for 20-somethings..." I was 24 years old. So I started avoiding stores and ordering clothes online.

Then came the turnaround, because that's my way. I can't control what happens—but I am in charge of what I do. I decided to rethink the way I felt about being overweight and focus on the positives. I told myself: *I'm big. I can't change that. At least let me look good.* I now make sure that my *sheitel* is perfectly done every day and my shoes and clothing match. I wear a little makeup and jewelry, and I look much better.

Here's what I discovered: I don't have to be smaller to look good. I do what I can. I take care of myself and I have

The world is standing still,
Feelings of disbelief
Losing hope and will,
Causing havoc and grief
No one knows what to believe,
Our fate is unknown...
We must come to realize
That God makes the plans
Tonight unite
Let's fight this
Outbreak, heartache
And darkness
We know
We trust Hashem that
It is meant to be

It Is Meant to Be

COMPOSED BY
P. B. AND GERSHY SCHWARCZ
LYRICS BY
SURY FREUDENBERGER, GERSHY & KAYLA SCHWARCZ



renewed energy. I smile for photos: a proper smile, wide, with my teeth showing. I've noticed that many people smile without showing their teeth, as if they need to hide a part of themselves.

My song "Beautiful" was created to talk about my journey and how I hated to look in the mirror. It's about accepting ourselves as we are, wearing our crown and recognizing what makes us beautiful. Why should someone's size define who she is?

After "Beautiful" was released, I heard from many women—thin, fat and in between. They shared how hard it is for them and for their daughters. Some girls are afraid they'll be made fun of, and this song helped them feel stronger and more comfortable to be how Hashem created them.

In 2020, I planned my first live concert for women. It would be held at the Master Theater in Brooklyn on Chol Hamoed Pesach and would feature me and the Brooklyn Girls Choir. I hired an emcee, lined up other performers and paid a deposit on the hall. I advertised in magazines.

Then COVID hit.

The concert was canceled and I lost a lot of money. I was devastated. But as always, I turned to my piano. I ran my fingers over the keys and thought: *Is it worth being upset about this? Will it change anything?* That's when the idea for a song came to me: "It Is Meant to Be." My brother, Gershy Schwarcz, produced it. All my songs are recorded in his studio, Edgware Studios.

We released the recording at the height of COVID. The song is about facing disappointment and choosing *simchah*. There's a power to joy, especially during a time of suffering. The song is lively. You can dance to it even though it speaks about heartbreak. This episode was a turnaround for me as well, a spiritual exercise in drawing closer to Hashem through *simchah*.

Around the same time, my grandmother, Buba Hochberg, passed away. She was 99 years old and the last of my four grandparents. We'd always been close. Before Purim of that year I'd visited London. When I sang to her, she said, "I love hearing new songs because it makes things interesting." This was fascinating to me. I'd expected that people prefer songs they know—especially as they grow older—but she was artistic and appreciated new melodies and lyrics. She was always my cheerleader!

In memory of my grandmother, I started a Zoom event called *The Dobby Show*. I sent emails out to let my

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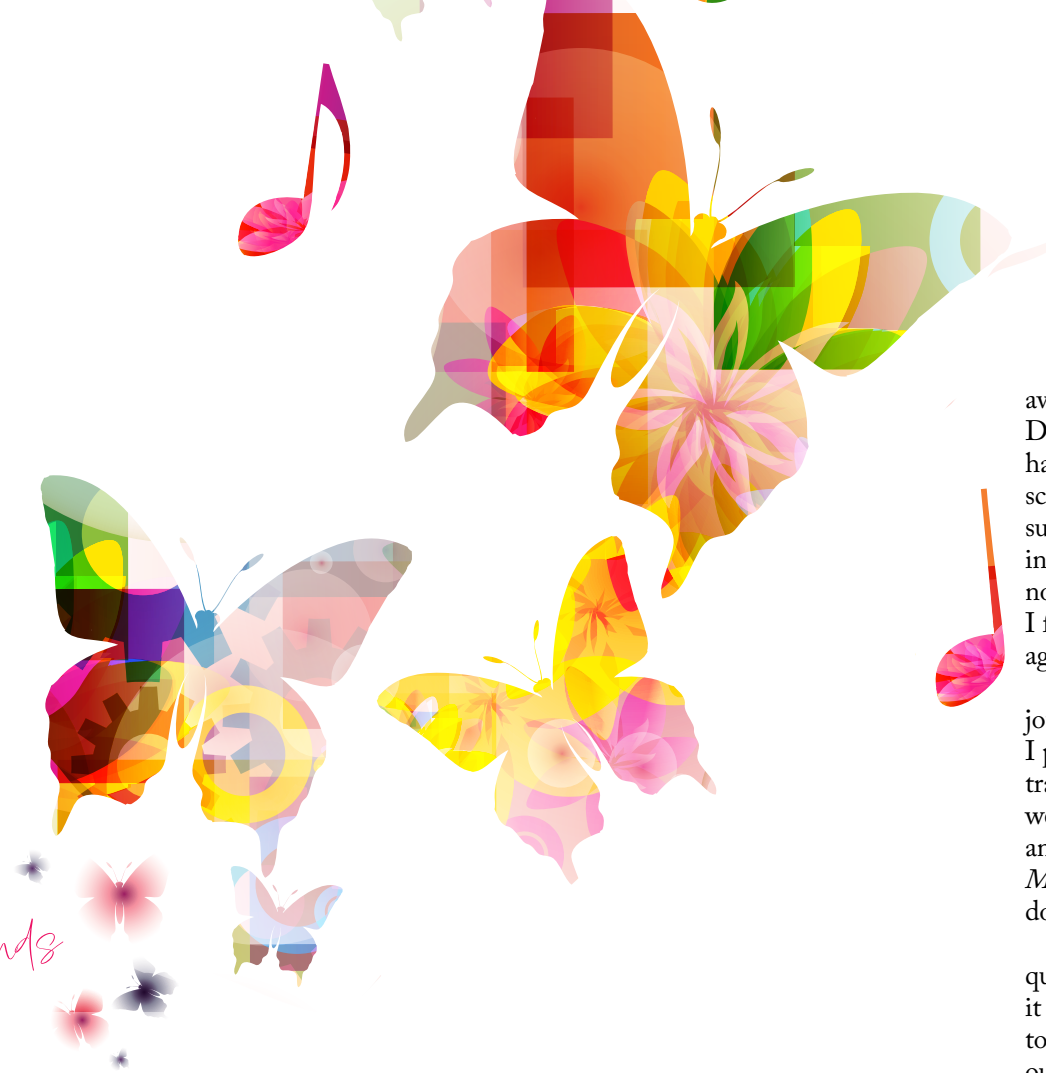
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Hashem, please heal
And give me strength
We cry to You
Chazkeinu
I found someone Who understands
You can do this
You'll pull through this
The future is in your hands
I found someone who feels my pain
You can do this
You'll pull through this
You will rise again

Give Us Strength

COMPOSED BY DOBBY BAUM
LYRICS BY SHIFFY Z.



contacts know about it and they passed it on. The first *Dobby Show* was watched by 1,000 people, and more tried to get in but couldn't fit. I was so grateful to Hashem. I never expected it to take off like that! *The Dobby Show* continued to run several times a week throughout the pandemic. I always started with a *perek* of *Tehillim* and then we sang. I invited guest speakers, singers, comedians, authors, chefs, fashion designers and an array of people who shared their journeys of *teshuvah*. I even invited some creative children entrepreneurs to talk about what they were doing.

During COVID, I joined with Bracha Jaffe to organize a Lag Ba'Omer virtual unity concert. We brought ten *frum* women singers from around the world together, hired a videographer, got sound equipment and performed in a garage in Brooklyn. It was a beautiful event. There was a great feeling of camaraderie among the singers. All of us are in the same industry, but every voice is unique and needed.

It is in the hardships where we can often see the opportunity and the gifts. A year ago, at a time when I needed her most, Hashem sent me a manger named Chana Hindy Tauber, who became a close friend. And when I moved to America with my husband, I had no siblings living here. Now three of my brothers—Paltiel, Gershy and Duvid—live here as well. In 2023 our family moved from Brooklyn to Monsey.

In the meantime, my yearning to be a doctor hadn't gone away, even though I'd been much too busy to pay attention. During COVID the world shut down, and I suddenly had time. My husband encouraged me to start my medical schooling, and I did. I completed my pre-med courses. In the summer of 2022 I went to Greece and scrubbed for surgery in a hospital in Athens. I lived on cans of tuna and instant noodle soup and ate at the Chabad House on Shabbos. And I fell in love with the idea of practicing medicine all over again.

No one knows what the future will bring. I'm taking this journey one step at a time. Music is the call of my *neshamah*. I perform and teach singing, and I continue my own vocal training, but my interest in medicine is a force in my life as well. I wrote a research paper on the anatomy of the larynx and a singer's voice, which was published in the *Touro Medical Journal*. I'd love to become a laryngologist, a voice doctor.

I spoke to many doctors and asked them the same question: "Is it possible to do both?" They all replied, "Yes, it is. And in fact, having an outlet is healthy." I'm applying to medical school and creating the vessel, knowing that the outcome is in Hashem's hands.

Hashem has sent me signs that medicine and music can be combined. I work as a medical scribe for an ENT. He has allowed me to observe many laryngeal endoscopies, close-ups of the voice box and throat. I watched the vocal cords vibrate and was fascinated by how wondrous the human body is. There have been funny incidents as well. I worked as a medical assistant at a pediatric office in Boro Park to pick up some experience. I love working with the kids. Sometimes I meet mini fans—like the little girl who recognized me from my music videos and said, "Mommy, can the singer do my blood test?"

My album *Hero* came out on Erev Pesach of this year. The cover features a painting by Nechama Fineart. The strokes of a paint brush convey more depth and meaning than graphic art. It depicts a woman, but you cannot see her face. The name of the album was inspired by the song "Hero," which was written by Estee Rosenberg, a former member of the Brooklyn Girls Choir. On the album I sing the song in a duet with my sister Frimi. I chose the title to make the point that a woman is a hidden hero, working with *tznius* and dignity. We don't always get the recognition for the battles we wage behind the scenes.

I consult *daas Torah* to guide me in every aspect of my life. For example, before the release of the Brooklyn Girls Choir album, I asked Rav Falk, *zt"l*, the author of *Oz V'hadar*

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Levushah for advice. He gave me a *brachah* for the project and encouraged me to use various platforms for my music, as long as my songs are clearly marked “*kol ishab*.”

The voice of a woman is different from that of a man. There are some songs—such as those I sing about challah or covering hair—that are obviously expressed better when a

woman sings them. “Hero” is a feminine album, and an empowering one. At a concert in Panama this year, I sang before an audience of 300 women. They were all different. Some were *frum*. Some were just starting out on their spiritual quest. I saw how glad they were to be in a room with other women, all of us singing praises to Hashem together.

Calling all my sisters around
Let's show the world what
we're all about
We can be the stars that are shining in the dark
We play our own special part...
Our hearts are beating
Let's start believing
That when all unite
We are the fighters
And we're forever
Sisters, you and I



We Are the Power

COMPOSED BY PINNY B.
LYRICS BY ELISHEVA TOIV

As I look back upon my journey, I see how there was a chance for something wondrous to take place in every difficulty. When I was young, I *davened* because that's what we had to do. It was almost robotic as we opened our *siddurim* and said the words. Now, I take great joy in *tefillah*. I say the words of *davening* mindful that I'm talking to Hashem, and I feel my *neshamah*. In every part of my life I've found my connection to *Yiddishkeit* getting stronger. As a girl, I would sometimes count the minutes for Shabbos to be over. Now Shabbos is precious, and I savor it. My panic attacks, my struggle with weight and

self-image, the many setbacks as well as the long road and its many diversions have taught me to trust in Hashem and to build my relationship with Him.

When women tell me that they love to sing but don't have nice voices, I tell them to sing anyway. There's a song inside all of us. Sometimes it's a hidden song, but it can always be a happy one. The first woman to sing in the Torah is Miriam. My daughter's name is Chaya Miriam, and I dream of singing joyously with her along with Miriam Haneviah and every woman who has found the beauty and power of her voice. ●



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