Although Reb Shlomo Carlebach, who passed away in 1994 is no longer with us, his legacy seems to have taken on proportions beyond all expectations. Carlebach minyanim are now found everywhere, Shabbat services from Reform to Orthodox have incorporated his melodies, concerts everywhere advertise themselves as “in the ruach of Reb Shlomo,” Shabbatons are promoted as Shlomo Shabbats and wedding bands universally play his songs. Shlomo web sites and e-mail lists are active, repackaged tapes spanning thirty five years of recordings and concerts line Jewish book stores.

When Reb Shlomo released his first music record in the late 1950’s, the Jewish world was still reeling from the horrors of the Holocaust and was preoccupied with the survival of the new State of Israel. Assimilation and intermarriage figures were starting to skyrocket as Jews left the fold in record numbers. Jewish education, ruled by old fashioned methods, was incapable of responding to the challenges at hand. An entire generation of young Jews suffered through a superficial Jewish education where Bar and Bat Mitzvah was a ritual to endure, marking in most cases the end of Jewish education and commitment, instead of the beginning. By the 1960’s and 1970’s these trends reached such alarming proportions that it brought into question the very survival of the Diaspora. Reb Shlomo’s music, charisma, and tolerance were like a breath of fresh air. He spoke to the hearts of Jews all over the globe as he brought a message of Jewish pride, joy and hope.

After the initial shock of his death, an almost telepathic occurrence took place among his closest followers. It became clear that if Reb Shlomo’s teachings, music and type of prayer were to survive, it now fell to those closest to him to carry on his tradition. Throughout the thirty days after his death and during the entire first year, his students around the world simultaneously began organizing concerts, memorial services, and probably most important, Kabbalat Shabbat with “nusach Shlomo.” Buoyed by the initial successes of these events they continued with even greater confidence and things began to

take on a momentum of their own. Reb Shlomo became a rallying point for those seeking to express a new vision of what Torah experience could be.

Although those leading the Carlebach phenomena in many cases are his oldest students and their children, it is clear that it is a new generation of young people who are the most attracted to the spirituality of his music and teachings. And the attraction is across the board – from the unaffiliated to religious. In Israel his popularity is as strong among the Hebrew speaking Bnei Akiva and Yeshivot Hesder youth as it is among English speaking communities. Black hatters and even streimals can be seen at many Carlebach minyans as well.

At universities around the globe Carlebach style minyanim are part and parcel of the Jewish landscape. In a sense this completes a circle, in as much as Reb Shlomo's first foray into kiruv was on college campuses. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, sent him out in the mid 1950's in order to try to awaken a generation asleep to its Jewish connection. For years Reb Shlomo visited campuses, summer camps, youth groups, Talmud Torahs and day schools inspiring youth to the joy of being Jewish.

We live in a very paradoxical time. On one hand, due to the incredible changes brought about by technology, the world is becoming more materialistic and accessible, a virtual world village. At the same time, people feel more isolated, spiritually dissatisfied and in need of deeper meaning in life than ever. Within the Jewish world the younger generation is tired of the divisiveness between the different trends of Judaism and the "politics" it engenders. They are fed up with the divisions that are ripping many Jewish communities apart, the religious-secular rift in Israel and the loss of idealism that once represented Zionism. Most of all, young Jews today want a type of Judaism that merges heart and mind, ancient and modern, speaking to the issues that most directly effect them as individuals and the world at large, a deeply personal, spiritual Judaism that speaks to the soul, creates a sense of

community and belonging and a reveals the inner spiritual dimensions of Torah. To a growing number of people Reb Shlomo represents these ideals in a real and tangible way.

One small incident from an NCSY National Convention in the early 1990's illustrates this. On Shabbat, the convention divided into discussion groups and as a Regional Director I lead a group of 12th graders from day school and Yeshivah backgrounds, most of whom were on their Regional Boards and in a few cases the National Board. In other words, the cream of the cream of NCSY. Our discussion turned to the state of prayer in the Orthodox shuls they attended. Although all of them were committed to attending services regularly, they expressed without exception tremendous frustration at the lack of singing, spirit or feeling of community. It just happened that the President of the Orthodox Union sat in on my group. When we finished our discussion and the students dispersed, he confided that he knew something was amiss in the shuls, but didn't realize the depth of the problem till hearing the students express their real feelings.

It is students like these and others of all ages who now flock to Carlebach davening, where praying together has become something to not only look forward to, but something one can enthusiastically bring new people to experience. And it is not only Carlebach prayers on Shabbat. The way Reb Shlomo turned a fifteen minute rote chuppa, kiddush levana or brit mila into a deeply moving experience is catching on as well and is being introduced at more and more Jewish occasions.

Reb Shlomo was continually pushing all those around him to strive for the fullest Jewish experience at every moment, never accepting rote performance of any mitzvah. At concerts, teachings and Shabbat he would urge everyone to "get deeper – reach higher." I remember him stopping the davening on Shabbat on more than one occasion when the singing was lacking enthusiasm and telling everyone that it doesn't matter that we kept Shabbat last week or

last year, what matters is that THIS Shabbat has to be the best Shabbat ever. The way he lit the Chanukah candles, made kiddush, shook lulav or gave a blessing – he taught by example how every moment was truly a unique opportunity to connect to God and each other. His was a unique blend of tradition and spontaneity, halacha and creativity.

His love and tolerance of every Jew was legendary. And it was not just on stage that people heard him emphasize the importance of breaking through the superficial differences between Jews, but it was the way he treated everyone who came into his presence that was a constant source of inspiration. His acts of charity knew no bounds and his time was sanctified to drawing all of Israel close to Torah.

Like Avraham Avinu whose mission it was to bring the knowledge of One God to the whole world, Reb Shlomo felt strongly that the time had come for Jews to be a real light unto the nations In scores of interfaith gatherings he was the token Jew and he represented Judaism without apologetics, presenting it as a spiritual path that had what to say to every human being. He used to say that perhaps the whole world is angry with us because we have something very special and yet are so reluctant to share it. Just as Avraham had a tent open on all four sides in order to host all who would pass by, Reb Shlomo similarly felt bound by that tradition.

Due to the disastrous situation of assimilation and intermarriage he urged everyone to actively reach out to every Jew in order to expose him or her to the beauty of our heritage. His method was to do this in a non-judgmental way, never pressuring or cajoling, rather relating to everyone with mutual respect and love. He taught that every Jew may not be holy, but every Jew is the Holy of Holies; and by relating to others in this manner we can rekindle their holy spark once again.

The land of Israel and especially Jerusalem were a central focus of his songs and teachings. He truly fulfilled Rebbe Nachman's statement that wherever he was going – he was going to Jerusalem. Although he advocated doing all we could to achieve peace with our Arab neighbors, he felt strongly that all the Jewish people had was one small homeland and we should not feel ashamed to proclaim it to the world. He was truly a good will ambassador for the Holy Land everywhere he went.

Reb Shlomo felt strongly that women should take a more active role in the Jewish community and make their presence felt. He encouraged women to be learning and teaching more publicly and gave space for women's expression whenever possible. He emphasized the importance of a warm, loving environment in the home and how children need constant encouragement to grow spiritually.

In all venues he promoted the learning of Torah and the performance of mitzvot as the unique spiritual path of the Jew. In countless stories of the Chassidic Rebbes he showcased the importance of learning Torah as the key to Jewish spirituality and survival. Through his extensive knowledge of both the revealed and hidden Torah, he showed the incredible depths contained in every word, every prayer, every law. It was always clear to everyone that the source of his inspiration to sing, teach and be joyous was deeply rooted in our holy Torah.

Reb Shlomo's way was redemptive in nature and my own hope, more than a prediction, is that the wellsprings of Jewish spirit and wisdom that he uncovered for so many will continue to vitalize all those who need to drink from its living waters until "the knowledge of God fills the earth like the waters cover the sea."