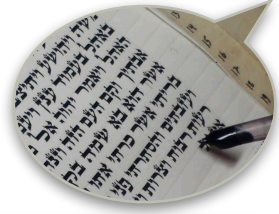




The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



Sefer Devarim

Parshat Ha'azinu

Tishrei 5784 / September 2023

SING.....SING A SONG.....

By Alan Wildes

Ha'Azinu is an extraordinary parsha, and to understand where this “song” comes from, we must look back to the end of last week’s parsha, Vayelech.

Uncharacteristic of the individual parshiyot in the Torah, Vayalech ends on a somber note. In the final psukim, Moshe calls out to the elders of the tribes and to the (police) officers and proceeds to tell them that, after his death, the Jewish nation ‘will be corrupt, stray from God’s path, do evil in the eyes of God and anger Him.’ We are then told in the last pasuk that Moshe spoke ‘the words of this (following) song....’

Doesn’t it seem odd that immediately after Moshe tells the leaders that Bnei Yisrael will do terrible things and that God will be angry with them, he breaks into a song? Why choose to confront them with troubling news and then sing?

Moshe’s “song” of Ha’Azinu is the metaphorical prose portion of his farewell speech that spans the entire fifth book of the Torah and comprises 43 out of the 52 psukim in this week’s parsha. The formatting of the song’s text in the Torah is unique. Other special text arrangements in the Torah include the Brachot Jacob gave his sons, the Shirah (Az Yashir), the Ten Commandments, the prohibited relations, Bircat Kohanim, and the Tochecha (the rebuke) — none of these is written in poetic lines, a style that is unique to the song of Ha’Azinu.

By differentiating the text formatting, the Torah calls our attention to those specific passages and portions (think of the way the names of Haman’s sons are listed in Megillat Esther).

Aside from emphasis, the poetic format makes the “song” (actually Moshe’s directives) easier to remember (see below) and allows for Moshe’s artistic expression.

The Parsha begins with, “Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and may the earth hear the words of my mouth.”

When addressing the heavens, Moshe uses a sterner tone....as if to say, ‘Listen carefully to what I am about to say to you.’ Speaking to the earth, Moshe uses a softer tone.

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The heavens are a spiritual entity and do exactly as they're commanded, even if they don't understand why. And the forceful expression is to ensure they listen carefully to remember something that may not be self-evident.

The earth, on the other hand, being entirely physical, needs to understand what it is doing and why. Thus, softer language is used to put the people in a receptive mind frame to understand what they are told to do — when they are given logical and easy-to-understand instructions, they will remember them.

At the end of this parsha, Moshe is told to go up to Mount Nebo and gaze upon the land that he will not enter. He is also told that he will die on that mountain in 'the same fashion as his brother Aaron died.' Why the comparison? What was so special about how Aaron died?

One of the beautiful things that Aaron merited was to see his son succeed him as the Kohain Gadol. And Moshe? Yehoshua succeeded him, not either of his sons. So how is that in 'the same fashion as Aaron'?

Moshe was an amazing leader, but more importantly, Moshe was a great teacher, and his legacy lives on in our entire nation, all of whom were and are his children because of the Torah that he taught the Jewish people and that continues to be learned today.

And when we read this unique song/poem and prepare to bid farewell to Moshe this Shabbat Shuva in Shul, I will be thinking of Howard Aubrey, *a"h*, who passed away today. Howard, like Aaron, was a Kohain who spoke softly. He was a mensch, a gentleman with a great sense of humor, and, like Aaron, merited to see his sons follow in his footsteps with respect to Yiddishkeit and menclichkeit. T'hay Nishmatoh Tzrurah B'tzror Hachayim!

Alan has been a proud member of YIS for over 29 years and is driven to help foster the warm and inclusive environment that is the hallmark of our Shul and the YIS community.

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