

## Beshalach - Rabbi Lerner - January 9, 2011

The Shira at the Yom Suf

**Oznayim LaTorah**: (based on **Shemos Rabah**): Why does the shira begin with the word *Az* - then? There are other previous times where the word *Az* is used in the Torah - Bereishis 4:26 "*Az Huchal Likroh Beshaim Hashem* - then they began to call out in the name of Hashem" - Rashi says that this was the beginning of Avodah Zarah - they were using the name of God for different objects of worship - it was in the generation of Enosh that idolatry began. The first mention of idolatry is introduced with the word *Az*, and the shira is tied in to that word. Originally the Yom Suf was dry land, but Hashem made it into a sea, a yom. Why did Hashem make a yom to destroy the Egyptians, instead of punishing them some other way? This dry land turned into a sea during the time of Enosh - an underground sea rose and covered 1/3 of the land because of Hashem's anger at the world for pursuing idol worship (see Rashi in Beraishis, 6:4); the Yom Suf was one of the areas that was flooded because of this idolatry. Hashem saves Bnai Yisrael with these waters which first appeared because of the sin of idolatry - the mission of the Jews and the reason God saved us is for us to reverse this trend of idolatry - it was a tikun for that sin - this *Az* is a tikun for that *Az*. The Shira stresses that we recognize Hashem as the only true God, there are no others like him - this miracle brought the Jews to the greatest heights of Emunah, and we acknowledge that there is none like him, and idolatry is a false idea - this is what was recognized by the Jews at the Yom Suf and it is the major theme of the Shira.

**Rav Nissan Alpert**: what is the big deal of this miracle of the splitting of the sea that induced the Jews to now sing shira, more so than all of the other miracles that God brought in Egypt? In all of the other miracles God performed them and we were the passive recipients - we did not have to do anything to help them come about. However, this miracle at the sea was begun by the Jews - Hashem told Moshe to stop praying - He will not do anything until the Jews do something - they must journey forth - we had to show faith in God before Hashem would create the miracle; our act of Mesiras Nefesh induced Hashem to then create the miracle. The angels wanted to sing hallel over the death of the Egyptians and Hashem stopped them because His creations were being destroyed; however, we were allowed to sing because it was also our salvation; we don't sing for the destruction of the enemy, but for our salvation; we are the ones who were singing the shira.

What is the meaning of the word *Shira*, to sing? **Rashi**: when Moshe saw the miracle it came upon him to not just witness it - he felt that they had to sing and acknowledge this mitzvah. But why is it written in the future tense - *then they will sing*? The Midrash says that this is a remez to the resurrection of the dead - in the future they will sing again after they arise from their graves; this is one of the sources for Techiyas Hameisim. The simple peshat is not that they sang, but Moshe put it upon his mind that they **have** to sing - this pasuk states his thought process first, that he realized he had to sing a shira with the Jews, and then afterwards he actually does sing the shira; the Torah starts from the point where he had this powerful emotion within him; he thought about it first and then proceeded to follow through. **Abarbanel** and **Ramban** disagree; the **Mechiltah** on this pasuk says that *Az* can sometimes refer to the past, but also sometimes

to events of the future; the *Az* where it means the past tense are the cases of Enosh and the Yom Suf; but there clearly are cases of *Az* for the future - "*Az Yomru Hagoyim*" and others. The most famous *Az* that must mean the past is when Moshe at the end of his life separates the first three cities of refuge on the other side of the Jordan River - he was about to die and it uses the words *Az Yavdil* - it has to mean the past tense there since Moshe soon after dies.

**Abarbanel**: Who composed this shira? It sounds like it was both Moshe and the Jewish people from the wording of the pasuk. However, just because it says it this way, it does not mean that they were equal partners in the song. It was only Moshe who composed the song. But, when it came to the singing of the song, there was a choir of the Jews - they all sang it. But even when they sang it, the Gemorrah in Sotah says Moshe would say one pasuk and then the Jews would repeat it; that is why it says the word *Laymor* in the first pasuk of *Az Yashir*. But the Jews only kept repeating the same pasuk of *Ashira Lashem Ki Gaoh*, etc - the entire shira was composed and sung by Moshe, while the Jews just kept repeating that one pasuk as a refrain; they did not say anything else. There are proofs for this - when you go look at the song of the women, they say only this pasuk - Miriam gets them to recite this same key pasuk. The final pasuk of the shira (15:19) goes back to that same theme of the horses and riders being drowned in the sea. It only makes sense that Moshe is saying this by himself when he uses the words *Ad Ya'avor Amchah Hashem* - in 15:16 - Moshe is talking in the third person about the Jews and Hashem waiting for them. This shira was the first instance in Chumash where Moshe composed his own words and Hashem was so taken by them that He incorporated it into the Torah. This is what the Abarbanel also says happened with the entire chumash of Devarim, where it was all Moshe's words and Hashem incorporated into His Torah. The shira was the first situation where a human's words became part of the Torah. Moshe did such an outstanding job that Hashem included it in His Torah, according to the same Kedusha as what Hashem says with His own words in His Torah.

15:1: Why is the fact that the horse and rider are overthrown so critical that it is the first pasuk? **Rabbeinu Bachya**: in God's eyes the Egyptians were like one horse and rider - that is how we should feel when we go out to battle. The horse is attached to the chariot - they are like small pawns - they are brought down to the depths of the sea and then raised up as a unit - this was like the nuclear power of that day and God plays with it like a small toy. The Jews are paralyzed with fear because they did not have horses and chariots which were the most powerful weapons of that time, and they feared being trampled; God shows that He can take this unit and toy with it, making it into nothing.

*Ki Ga'oh Ga'ah* - Simple peshat: This miracle shows how exalted God is - He is powerful above the most powerful.

**Rashi**: *Ki Ga'oh Ga'ah* - this can also mean that this shira is more exalted than all others - we will sing this most exalted shira, and even this shira does not touch the description of the powers of God. **Ramban**: this idea is seen later in the shira as well in 15:11 - *Norah Sehilos* - awesome in praise - it means tremendous awe and fear - it says that whatever we say in praise of God will not be adequate, that we will fall far short in our praise to Hashem. That is why we say in Tehilim that "silence is the greatest praise" - this means that it is an impossible task to praise God - our praise is never adequate and sometimes it is better not to try to praise Him because we cannot do it justice. This is enshrined in Halachah, why we cannot add to the first three brachos of Shemonah Esrei

or to the final three brachos of thanks to Hashem in the Shemonah Esrei; we use this formula that was created by the Anshei Kaneses Hagedolah, who were writing with nevuah - God guided them as to what would be okay for us to say in our tefillos, and we are not allowed to add anything more - if we add we are actually detracting - it makes us look as if we are trying to complete something that cannot be completed. The middle section we can add to, but not the first and last three brachos.