

Parshat Haazinu 5780

Haazinu contains Moshe Rabbeinu's Shira, the "song" that he gave over to Bnai Yisroel before his death. Like all biblical poetry, it is hard to translate, and much harder to understand. Throughout the generations, Chazal have poured over the texts to attempt to give us some insight into its meaning.

Ramban (32:38) famously suggests that all episodes in Jewish history are contained within these verses. The overriding themes are that Hashem, through unbounded kindness, gave us the Torah and took us into Eretz Yisrael with great miracles. Over time, the Jewish people rebelled and did not keep the Torah, which led to various exiles, the last of which is still endured today. However there will come a time when Hashem turns to His people and says that they are ready to be redeemed. In Chapter 32 (36-40) Moshe tells us that Hashem will be looking at the other Nations, and He will tell them to seek support from their gods, whereupon they will see that the only Power in the world is Hashem Himself who will be the saviour of the Jewish people. Ramban makes clear that this redemption is a cast iron promise, independent of Bnai Yisrael doing teshuva or showing renewed commitment to the Torah.

This is interesting because Haazinu, unlike this year, is usually read, on Shabbat shuva and having a promise that we will obtain the ultimate redemption without putting in the effort to become a better person, seems to go against all the themes that we have been expressing over the past six weeks.

Indeed the Rambam takes a different approach to this parsha. In his classic work, the Mishneh Torah in Hilchot Tefila, chapter 13:5 the Rambam tells us the halacha that when we layn from the Torah each week, we should be careful to only make stops for aliyot in subject matters which relate to positive things. Whilst the aliyot are generally fixed and so most of the discretion of when to break up the sedra is now not required, this is still relevant when we make extra "hosafot" – stops when we need extra aliyot at a simcha or if we have many chiyuvim. In these situations, we need to be careful not to stop in a place which has a negative theme such as punishments or bad news.

The Rambam says that Haazinu is the only exception to this rule. He sets out precisely where we need to stop for each aliya, which is in fact at places that often relate suffering and punishment. Says the Rambam, that this is to stir us to do

teshuva. This fits in well with why it is read at this time of year, and would appear to be an alternative view to the Ramban, who said that the promises in the parsha are independent of the presence of Teshuva.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (97:1) learns out from our parsha that the pesukim referred to above, teach us that the Geula will only come when Bnai Yisroel have given up all hope of Mashiach coming. This chazal clearly requires some explanation as one of our 13 Principles of Faith that we truly believe that Mashiach can come at any point. If so, why does the gemara seem to suggest that we could almost encourage people to give up hope of it coming, so that it should arrive.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky in his Sefer Emes L'Yaacov explains that the Gemara does not mean that we should give up hope of it coming altogether, rather that we need to stop thinking that the Geula will come from political or other natural sources. As long as we believe that one day all the other nations will come to the Messianic Era through natural diplomacy and due process, through discussions and acceptance of the position of the Jewish people in the world, then Moshiach will never come. It is only once we accept that the Geula will only come from HKBH and nowhere else, that we will be ready for his arrival. Perhaps the idea of Rav Kaminetsky, that we need to believe in the coming of moshiach through supernatural means, and that of the Rambam/Ramban as to whether we need to do teshuva to merit the ultimate redemption, are coming from a similar place.

Of course, Hashem gives us an ultimate end date. There will come a day, whether or not we have done sufficient teshuva, and whether or not we believe that only Hashem can provide the Geula, when we will indeed be redeemed and Moshiach will arrive. As we read a few weeks ago, in Nitzavim "Hanistarot LaHashem Elokeinu" – there is a time which is hidden and only known to Hashem, which is the long stop date. But that is not a moment to aspire towards. If we have to wait until the last desperate moments then we almost will have to be dragged to the Geula. That is why the passuk continues "Vehaniglot Lanu Ulevanainu" – there is also a time that we do know about, which is when we keep Hashem's Torah.

It will be far better to be stirred by the tochachot and warnings in our parsha and by the last few weeks of Yamim Noraim, or to look ahead to performing the mitzvot of sukkot; so that we can be inspired to a full teshuva and a meaningful renewed commitment to torah and a speedy geula.