

Parshat Haazinu 5777

In last week's Parashah we became aware of two distinct parts of the Torah, both written by Moshe: "Torah" and Shirah (Song). We read in Devarim 31:9: *And Moshe wrote this Torah and he gave it to the Kohanim of the tribe of Levi, those who carry the ark of Hashem's covenant.*

Rashi as explained by Siftei Chachamim defines the expression "this Torah" as referring to "all of the Torah, from 'Bereishit' until 'in the eyes of all Israel', i.e., the entire text of the Chumash. This is a very complex text to master, and is entrusted to the "Kohanim of the tribe of Levi". In contrast, we read in Devarim 31:19: *And now write down for yourselves this Song and teach it to the Jewish people, (so that they should) know it off by heart.* Rashi defines "this Song" as the words the last words of the Ha'azinu song. The Song is a much shorter text than the "Torah" and is amenable to memorization by the ordinary people, due to its poetic form and ability to be set to music. Torah and Shirah are both witnesses. *Take this Torah and place it beside the ark ... as a witness (31:26) ... that this Song might serve as a witness (31:19)*

What are "Torah" and "Shirah" testifying to? R. Yonatan Grossman explains that both testify to Israel's covenant with Hashem, and the consequences if they do not maintain this covenant. How exactly does the Song testify to this covenant? Most of the Song is written in the third person; however, at key points, the Song switches to the second person and addresses Israel directly. Each switch to the second person constitutes the completion of a section of the song, enabling us to derive the following section breakdown:

Verses 1 to 6: Hashem is a righteous judge; **V.7 to 14:** From the Creation of the world until the Exodus from Egypt, Hashem has been good to his people. **V. 15 to 18:** Israel's ingratitude to Hashem. They repaid his goodness by practising idolatry. **V.19 to 38:** Hashem's anger at his rebellious people and their punishment. However, Hashem will rescue and redeem Israel in the end. **V. 39 to 43:** Hashem's mastery of the world.

The Song describes how Israel, despite enjoying Hashem's goodness, transgress His words and are given over to their enemies, only to be redeemed at the end. However, the Torah, in Parashat Nitzavim, in 29:15 to 30:10, already spells out the same process of punishment and redemption. Why the need for two witnesses? To answer this question we contrast the two verses brought at the top of this sheet. The second verse, 31:19 defines the audience for the Song as the Jewish people, who need to learn it off by heart so that it can always bear witness for them. In contrast, the Torah is a much longer and more complex text to master;

therefore the verse in 31:9 defines the primary audience for the Torah as the Kohanim, who might be said to be the Torah scholars of that generation. They will bear witness for the people. However the Sforno is of the opinion that the "Torah" mentioned in 31:9 was a different scroll, the *Parashat Hamelech*, which according to the Mishnah in Sotah 7:8, contains various sections from Deuteronomy, including the blessings and notably, the curses recorded in Parashat Ki Tavo. The *Parashat Hamelech* scroll was entrusted to the Kohanim who hand it to the king at the *Hakhel* ceremony. According to Sforno, it was this Torah scroll which, as described in II Kings 22:8, was discovered by Chilkijahu, the *Kohen Gadol* during the reign of the righteous King Josiah. This period followed the reigns of two particularly wicked kings of Judah, Ahaz and Menasseh, who between them had destroyed all Torah scrolls in the kingdom and had alienated the nation so totally from Torah that they were totally unfamiliar with its contents. When King Josiah read the *Parashat Hamelech* scroll, and in particular the curses of Parashat Ki Tavo, he was deeply alarmed. He subsequently engaged tremendous effort in renewing the covenant between Israel and God. The Torah scroll that Moshe entrusted to the *Kohanim* truly served as a loyal witness.

Redemption in the Song and in the Torah: Even though the Song and the Torah, both bear witness to the covenant, the nature of redemption presented by the two texts is very different. In Parashat Nitzavim (Torah) we read that Israel's redemption is dependent on *teshuvah* and human choice: *After the blessing and curse befall you shall take these things to heart in your lands of exile. You will return unto Hashem and hearken to his voice ... Hashem will return your captivity in compassion (30:1-3). Behold I place before you this day life and good, death and evil ... Choose life (30:15)* In contrast the Song describes how G-d will redeem his people regardless of whether Israel do *teshuvah*. G-d redeems us purely in order to prevent desecration of His name in the eyes of our enemies, who associate Israel's downfall with G-d's perceived weakness. *I thought of destroying them completely but I feared the wrath of the enemy who would have ascribed the victory to their own power and not to Hashem's acts. (Dev. 32:26-27)*

How can we reconcile these two versions of redemption? R. Grossman suggests two answers.

- (1) There really are two options. Redemption will come, but it is up to us to decide if it will be through our initiative, or if it be a harsher form of redemption in which we play no part.
- (2) Divine providence can take two forms. The form described in the Torah is a function of human choice. The form described in the Song is more transcendent and guides history according to God's infinite perspective. From our limited frame of reference the two cannot be reconciled. From the perspective of Hashem's infinite intellect they are the same.