



Ha'azinu: Beyond Words

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

"האזינו השמים ואדברה ותשמע הארץ אמרי פי"

"Listen, O heavens, and I will speak! And let the earth hear the words of my mouth!" (Devorim 32:1)

Parshas Ha'azinu represents the quintessential *Shira*; song of testimony. Shortly before his death, Moshe shares this song of devotion and commitment to God with his beloved people as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. It is in this song that Moshe reminds the people of their responsibilities to themselves, their nation and their God. The *Shira* is filled with both joy and sadness. Joy over the beautiful connection we have with our Father, and sadness as there are times when we leave, forsake and abandon Him. But despite the valleys and low points of the relationship – our collective heart is always with Hashem and we know that His Divine heart is always with us. The Maharal of Prague and the Maggid of Mezeritch stressed the importance of reciting the Song of *Ha'azinu* and knowing it by heart, *"for it purifies the mind and heart"*

But *Shira* is not simply a song, it is one of the most pure and beautiful expressions of love, devotion and commitment. Henry Giles, an English preacher in the mid-1800's, wrote: *"A song will outlive all sermons in the memory."* When there is a need to express something more profound than the simple meaning of spoken words, *Shira* begins where words end.

Why did Moshe choose to deliver his last messages in the form of a *Shira*?

Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik of blessed memory, in his comments on *Shiras HaYam* (the song recited by the people upon crossing the Red Sea), explains: *"Shira is appropriate only when one attains a victory—and to be a victor one must actively participate in the struggle"* (*The Warmth and the Light*, Feldheim, p. 129).

Shira can only be sung when one has accomplished something of epic proportions. *Shira* is the melodic culmination of man's work, toil and struggle to accomplish a particular goal. In order to cross the sea, the people had to summon incredible inner strength and belief in themselves and God. After walking into the roaring waves and emerging on the other side they sang *Shira* reflecting their incredible spiritual accomplishment.

Perhaps this is why Moshe chose to conclude his life and begin the next chapter of the Jewish narrative with *Shira*. Moshe told the people: *My children, you have triumphed. There were times during our forty-year journey when it looked as if we would not make it. There were times when you wanted to give up; there were times when I felt I could not go on. But you persevered, we persevered and we stand just mere steps away from the realization of our destiny. You have made it this far, and I know that you have the ability to be successful in the future. My happiness and pride are so great that I cannot capture it in words. I choose to express it in Shira.*

As we stand on the brink of a new year there are many uncertainties. But one thing is certain – we will face challenges. There will be both national and individual hurdles and obstacles we must traverse. May we find the strength to embrace and overcome our challenges. May we merit to lead lives of spiritual accomplishment. May we find the courage to create the melodic notes of our personal *Shira*.

Good Shabbos, Shana Tova and Chag Samayach