

Parshat Nitzavim & Vayelech: Symbiotic Song

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The last of the 613 *mitzvot* is to "write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel." What song is Hashem referring to? Rashi says that this *mitzvah* refers to *Parshat Haazinu*, which immediately follows this *parsha*. Biblical song is elevating and joyous. Yet, if we look at the text of *Parshat Haazinu*, we notice that most of it is very depressing. It tells of our straying from the path Hashem has laid out for us in His Torah and the terrible tragedies that therefore will ensue. How is this uplifting and joyous? All the commentators agree that *Haazinu* is definitely song. The Sefat Emet cites *Tehillim* where King David writes, "Of kindness and justice do I sing." *Bnei Yisrael* have the capacity to see God's love both in His kindnesses and in His justice, when He chastises us to bring us closer to Him.

While the Netivot Shalom agrees that most of the *shira* is chastisement, he chooses to focus on the last few verses of *Haazinu*. There Hashem reassures us that He will avenge the blood of His servants and appease His land and His people. This is Hashem's promise to us, that even if we are not worthy, He will never forget us. He will redeem us. This promise is a source of great encouragement throughout our history, and a powerful reason to sing.

Most of the Torah commentators, however, believe the "song" referred to here is the

entire Torah. They derive from this verse the *mitzvah* that every Jew must write his own *Sefer Torah*, a *mitzvah* that can be fulfilled by writing even one letter, as a single missing letter can invalidate the entire scroll and filling it in can make the entire scroll kosher again. How can the entire Torah be referred to as a song, especially since it is not written in poetic format? We can answer this question by examining the differences between song/poetry and prose. *Haamek Davar* notes that prose is generally writing that is meant to be fully understood upon its initial reading. Poetry, on the other hand, is defined by its "economy of language" and the particular elements that add shades of meaning to the lines. Each word and letter of the Torah offers greater insights into meaning, allusions, inferences, and secrets using the four basic elements (**PaRDe**"S") to uncover as many as 70 different interpretations of the text.

Rav Reiss uses the poetic image from Shir Hashirim to further explain this: "The King brought me into His chambers." When viewed from the outside, the castle is magnificent. However, as one enters and goes from room to room, his awe grows as he encounters greater richness and beauty. So, too, with Torah study. During a cursory reading, one can already recognize the Torah's splendor. However, as one delves ever more deeply into the text, one marvels at all the myriad nuances and textures that continue to be revealed.

Shirah, however, is song as well as poetry. Music can only be appreciated when the notes blend together to form a harmonious whole. Similarly, the Torah too must be appreciated as a whole more than any particular part. This is what King David meant, posits Rav Reiss, when he wrote, "The Torah of Hashem is perfect (complete); it restores the soul." Only when the Torah is studied and observed in its entirety does it have the ability to restore one's soul.

Rabbi I. Schwartz notes that all the *mitzvot* have one ultimate goal, to bring us closer to Hashem. This is the same reasoning that Rabbi Jacobson uses. If we were to make a list of everything we do each day it would appear to be very pedestrian. However, if we can find one uniting factor, it would add meaning to it all. We can make a conscious effort to see meaning even in eating and drinking as a means to energize us toward a meaningful life of Torah and *mitzvot*.

While Torah study and observance can be difficult at times, we can always find the strength to sing. Song is a spontaneous expression of our innermost souls. This is what Torah should be. It must become part of our very essence, as Rav Dessler teaches us. When Bnei Yisroel delve deeply into *Torah* study and give it voice, they sing the praises of Hashem and bear witness to His sovereignty over earth.

The Beginning: Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

On Rosh Hashana, Hashem decides everything that will happen in the coming year. All of creation is judged, even inanimate things. Since it is such a pivotal day, it would be sensible to stand in supplication and beg Hashem to fulfill all our personal requests. But this is not what the tefilot of Rosh Hashana are about. The few prayers in which we do ask for our specific needs such as *Zachreinu L'chaim* and *Avinu Malkeinu* were added after the period of the Talmud was written. What then is this holiday about? We know that the keys to a good judgment are repentance, prayer, and charity. Yet interestingly enough there is almost no mention of *teshuva* on

Rosh Hashana. Only the days afterwards are dedicated to repentance. Shouldn't Yom Kippur precede Rosh Hashana so that we come prepared for the Day of Judgment?

Each of our holidays correspond to various events in Jewish history. Pesach corresponds to the Exodus, Shavuot to the giving of the Torah, Sukkot to the clouds of glory in the desert. The only holiday not connected to any event related to the history of Jewish people is Rosh Hashana. Rosh Hashana commemorates the creation of mankind. Why then is it celebrated as a holiday? What is its potential? The creation of man was the beginning of a new reality. Until then, only Hashem existed.

The creation of man included the creation of the world because the world was created for man. Rosh Hashana contains within it the power of a new beginning. Every morning in *Shachrit*, we affirm that Hashem creates the world moment by moment. The will of Hashem willed it to exist for 5,777 years and it is this will that recreates it at every moment. What then is the difference between what happens every moment and Rosh Hashana? In order to understand this, we have to understand how and what the world was created for and how it functions.

Hashem created the world for a purpose. Had

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first man not eaten from the tree of knowledge, the purpose would have been fulfilled and the world would have entered the era of Mashiach and the resurrection of the dead. After Adam failed, Hashem divided the work of bringing the world to its purpose into segments. Each year we are assigned a different segment to rectify. Every Rosh Hashana, Hashem judges the world vis a vis its purpose and what was accomplished in the years before. The Jewish nation too is judged vis a vis its purpose and what segment will be assigned to them for the coming year. It's as if every Rosh Hashana the world receives a new existence, a soul so to speak, for the year. The past year is over. Now it must be recreated. Otherwise there will be no further existence.

The same idea plays out every Shabbat. The Ohr Hachaim explains the verse in the Torah, "*Ki sheshet yomim asah Hashem et ha'shamayim v'et ha'aretz*. For six days Hashem created heaven and earth." It should have said, "For in six days Hashem created heaven and earth." The Ohr Hachaim says when the world was created it was given life for six days. Its continued existence is dependent on the keeping of Shabbat by at least one person. Shabbat creates the soul for another week. In the same way on a larger scale says Rav Kirzner, Hashem gives existence to the world for another year on Rosh Hashana based on the particular purpose that must be accomplished in that particular year. Every Rosh Hashana has the power of renewal. We have

the power on this day to start anew, to recreate ourselves as if we were born today.

This brings to mind the definition of *teshuva* as explicated by the Rambam in Hilchot Teshuva. A person who does *teshuva* is as if he changed his essence. He becomes a new being. Rosh Hashana contains this power. We can recreate ourselves and start anew. It's an encouraging thought. Many times we think, if I was born today with the experience I have now, I would live my life very differently. On Rosh Hashana we can actually do that. We can start again. It's a new beginning, filled with promise, as we work to bring the world closer to its purpose.

Opening The Gates of the Machzor: Zichronot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

Rosh Hashana is called Yom Hazikaron, the Day of Remembrance. This begs the question, why would we want Hashem to remember on the Day of Judgment? Wouldn't we rather He forgive and forget? The goal here, though, is for us to remember. We need to stop and think, why are we here in this world and what is our role meant to be?

According to many scientific studies, we never forget anything. The data is stored somewhere in our brain, it's just not accessing that information at the moment. If we get into a serious altercation with someone and the person asks for forgiveness, neither one of us ever forgets it. All it takes is a little shake up in the relationship and we remember everything the person ever did wrong. The idea of forgiving and forgetting is not what Rosh Hashana is about. In his profound mercy, Hashem says to us, "I remember the entire you. I remember your soul through all its previous incarnations. I remember where you

came from and what abilities and potential you were given. I remember all your previous good deeds. I remember your failures and efforts. The parts of you that you want to erase and forget, remember. Let them uplift you. Let yourself soar with them. Let your sins become stepping stones to a brighter future."

"*Vayizkor Elokim et Noach ve't kol hachaya...-vayavor Elokim ruach...vayeshoku hamayim*. Hashem remembered Noach, and the animals with him and Hashem passed a wind over the land and the water receded." Why do we start *Zichronot* with Noach? Noach is the only person in the Torah who was called a *tzadik*. He experienced much failure in his life. For years he tried to get the people of his generation to repent. He warned them of the impending flood but they ignored him. He was not able to convince anyone outside of his family to do *teshuva*. So we pray, "Hashem just as you remembered Noach's efforts, remember my efforts although I have failed. Remember

how many times I tried, how many times I opened that book on *shemirat halashon* although I keep messing up. Remember how I tried so hard to say 'I'm sorry' but the person didn't accept my apology. Give me the strength to keep trying no matter what."

"*Vayishma Elokim et naakatam vayizkor Elokim et brito*. Hashem heard their cries and remembered their covenant." Here we speak about the *brit* (covenant) and the *zechut* (merit) of our forefathers. *Zechut avot* is when we act in the ways of the *avot* and *imahot*. When we imitate their *middot* it evokes the merit and covenant of our *avot*. We ask Hashem to hear our cries and remember our forefathers. May our actions, thoughts, and desires match up to our great ancestors and may they stand as a merit in our stead to be inscribed for a year filled with blessing.