

THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Ha'azinu

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A Taste of Torah Singing a Different Tune

by Rabbi Yaakov Zions

This week's parsha, Ha'azinu, often gets less of our attention than it should, due to the busy holiday schedule of this time of year. A quick glance at our parsha should give us an indication of the special nature of this reading. It contains (with the exception of the last few verses) *Shiras Ha'azinu*, literally, the Song of Ha'azinu.

Ha'azinu is called a *shira*, or song, at the end of last week's parsha as well and throughout Rabbinic literature, yet it seems to be anything but a song. It speaks of the Jewish Nation's relationship with Hashem and other nations, and of future times when Hashem's justice will be meted out. Yet it is clearly classified as a song; the Mechilta (a Medrashic work) in Parshas Beshalach lists Ha'azinu as one of ten *shiros* of *Tanach* (Scriptures)!

The uniqueness of this *shira* is manifested in many ways. In a Torah scroll, each verse or phrase is written in two columns with a large space between the two. Additionally, the *aliya* breaks of this parsha are the only ones dictated by the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 31a), based on how the Levites sang this *shira* in the *Bais Hamikdash* (Temple) every Shabbos. We may therefore not change the location of these breaks, and no additional *aliyos* may be added, unlike other Shabbos readings (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 428:5). What is so special about this *shira*, and how are we to understand

what a *shira* truly is, so as to understand Ha'azinu's place among the other songs of *Tanach*?

It is important to note that *shira* need not be associated with a tune. Rabbi Shimon Schwab [Rav Schwab on Prayer, page 234] explains that *shira* refers to the words or lyrics, while the Hebrew term *zimra* refers to the tune. (This helps explain the commonly found term in Psalms "*mizmor shir*," which, based on the above, means a tune with lyrics.)

With this idea in mind, we can now understand the true nature of *shira*. It seems that the special usage of a *shira* is reserved for those special times when spiritual emotion can no longer be contained inside and comes pouring forth from Man. It can be due to a miraculous event, such as the Splitting of the Sea, or the vision of a time in the future when spiritual revelation will enlighten the physical world, such as *Shiras Ha'azinu*. It is thus not surprising that *Ha'azinu*, despite the trials and tribulations detailed within it, is classified as a *shira*, for it contains great spiritual depths.

Such great inspirational experiences are few and thus, there are just ten *shiros* recorded in *Tanach*, each one unique in its own way. Let us learn this *shira* properly, and may we experience the tenth *shira* which will take place in the Messianic Era (as detailed in the abovementioned Mechilta), speedily in our times!



Stories for the Soul

A Bright Future

When I was in yeshiva high school, secular studies were viewed by many as an onerous obligation that we students simply had to trudge through. Some students invested more effort, some less, and most everyone managed to graduate by the time 12th grade came to an end.

It was not unusual for us to have an "interesting" personality teaching us a particular subject. One such individual was a red-faced, rotund man who taught us mathematics. This fellow was usually involved in his can of Nestea, his upcoming vacation to Acapulco or some similar venue, and how his New York Giants were faring. (One's grade could well hinge on the Giants' performance that week.) We yeshiva boys would sometimes bring up G-d and religion, but there was no interest. This man was looking forward to the day he would retire.

A high school classmate of mine recently related that in a rare frank moment, this teacher waxed philosophical. "I envy you guys," he told my friend. "One of these years, I'll retire to Florida or some other similar place, and what will I do with the rest of my life? Sit around, watch TV, perhaps go on some trips. You, though, as an observant Jew, have a meaningful life ahead of you - for your entire life! I am jealous."

In this week's parsha, the Song of Ha'azinu details the travails the Jewish People will go through during the course of history.

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Kollel Happenings

DNA TESTING AT OCT. TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Cody Glickman, Doctoral Student at CU Anschutz, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they analyze the various strands of this new frontier. October 10th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

SFAS EMES: A PIERCING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

It is one of the most widely-studied works of our time. Sfas Emes gives us a glimpse into the infinite depths of Torah and Jewish thought. Kollel Scholar Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky is an expert in this great work, and a master in bringing its timeless lessons into daily life. Join Rabbi Karnowsky on Thursdays, 8:15-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St. Class on break for Sukkos until October 11.

THE LETTERS OF THE LAW: THE MELACHOS OF SHABBOS

Rabbi Shmuel Halpern received *semicha* (ordination) from Beth Medrash Govoha in 2016 and has spent the past four years receiving *shimush* (training in practical halacha) from Rabbi Micha Cohn of Lakewood. Rabbi Halpern now shares his halachic expertise in this weekly class that will help familiarize you with the laws of Shabbos. Monday evenings 8-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St. Class on break for Sukkos until October 15.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: ? What is unique about the way *Shiras Ha'azinu* (the song comprising most of Parshas Ha'azinu) appears in the Torah?

A: The Gemara (Megilla 16b) tells us how to write a *shira* in a *Sefer Torah* or other *Sifrei Kodesh* (Scriptures); most are written like bricks are arranged in a wall (*ariach al gabei leveina*), in a staggered fashion, while two songs (the deaths of the ten sons of Haman and the downfall of the 31 Canaanite kings) are written as columns (*ariach*

al gabei ariach). Our custom is to write *Shiras Ha'azinu* in columns as well. The Noda B'yehuda (Yoreh De'ah 2:176) rules that due to the fact that the Gemara does not include *Shiras Ha'azinu* in the abovementioned list, if the columns were written unevenly (some lines longer than others), it is not necessary to correct it!

This week's question: What is unique about the *haftara* read on Simchas Torah?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Chasam Sofer Part XII

Rabbi Sofer's charisma, scholarship and piety created cadres of devoted disciples, thousands of them, who carried on their great teacher's worldview. More than 100 of his disciples took positions as rabbis in other communities in Hungary, and they brought the Torah and outlook of their rebbito their communities, as well.

These innovations are in sharp contrast to the Volozhin Yeshiva, which was closed by the Russian government due to the yeshiva's refusal to introduce secular studies. It is important to understand the reason for this distinction. In the Russian Empire, the Czar was quite malevolent toward his Jewish subjects, and the goal of introducing secular studies was to ultimately reduce Jewish religious influence and encourage assimilation. Not so in Pressburg, where the Austro-Hungarian Empire

had a far better (though far from perfect) relationship with its Jewish citizenry. The Pressburg Yeshiva could thus afford to allow secular studies without the serious threat of secularization and assimilation that was being fomented in Russia.

During Rabbi Sofer's tenure as the rabbi of Pressburg, the Reform movement was growing and spreading across Western Europe. Rabbi Sofer tenaciously fought the Reform movement. He wrote a number of responsa against some of the seemingly innocuous changes the Reformers instituted in their temples, recognizing that while perhaps these changes were technically acceptable according to halacha, they were meant to undermine the traditional halachic approach of Judaism in a very sinister, subtle fashion.

Stories for the Soul

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Things seem bleak, but the Song of Ha'azinu assures us that in the end, our troubles will lead us to a bright future of eternal life with G-d. While

others may bask in the pleasures of the moment, we recognize that there is a much greater goal to live for.