

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Parshat HaShavua
Yeshivat Har Etzion

This parasha series is dedicated
in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l.

Mazal tov to Prof. Robert J. Aumann, father of our alumnus Yonatan and grandfather of our
alumnus David,
on winning the Nobel Prize in Economics!

"For the Lord's Portion is His People" **By Rav Mordechai Sabato**

Shirat Ha'azinu (the poem in Parashat Ha'azinu) is unique among all sections of the Torah, in that Moshe received an explicit command to write it and teach it to Benei Yisrael: "Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths" (Devarim 31:19). The shira will thereby be eternalized both in written form as well as orally - in the mouths of Benei Yisrael. To this we must add God's explicit promise that the shira will never be forgotten from the nation - "since it will never be lost from the mouth of their offspring" (31:21). These details reflect the importance the Almighty afforded the shira. This week, we will deal with the shira's function and its primary contents, in an attempt to explain its unique significance.

I. THE SHIRA'S PURPOSE: TO SERVE AS WITNESS

The shira's purpose was explicitly defined in God's introduction of the shira to Moshe, in Parashat Vayeilekh (31:16-21):

"The Lord said to Moshe: You are soon to lie with your fathers. This people will thereupon go astray after the alien gods in their midst, in the land that they are about to enter; they will forsake Me and break My covenant that I made with them. Then My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them. They shall be ready prey; and many evils and troubles shall befall them." (16-17)

"And they shall say on that day, 'Surely it is because our God is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us.' And I will hide My countenance on that day, because of all the evil they have done in turning to other gods." (18)

"Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be My witness against the people of Israel. When

I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey that I promised on oath to their fathers, and they eat their fill and grow fat and turn to other gods and serve them, spurning Me and breaking My covenant, and the many evils and troubles befall them - then this poem shall confront them as a witness, since it will never be lost from the mouth of their offspring. For I know what plans they are devising even now, before I bring them into the land that I promised on oath." (19-21)

Twice in this introduction we find the shira defined as a "witness" intended to testify against Benei Yisrael. To what exactly is the shira meant to bear witness?

Verse 21 implies that the need for the shira arises when the people encounter "many evils and troubles." It would therefore seem that the shira comes simply to testify to the nation's having been forewarned that abandoning God will result in these calamities. Sure enough, a survey of the shira reveals that it speaks of a people suffering from hardship and crisis. All the events preceding the troubles are described in past tense, whereas the events resulting from them are guaranteed in the future tense. What remains unclear, however, is the singular importance of this testimony.

It appears that we may find the key to clarifying this issue at the end of verse 17 and in verse 18:

(17) "And they shall say on that day, 'Surely it is because our God is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us.'"

(18) "And I will hide My countenance on that day, because of all the evil they have done in turning to other gods."

What is the relationship between these two verses?

The Ramban understood the nation's comments as reflecting their penitent contemplation:

"And they shall say on that day, 'Surely it is because our God is not in our midst...' - this does not constitute an outright confession, as in 'They shall confess their iniquity' [Vayikra 26:40], but rather contemplation and remorse, [meaning] that they will regret their offense and acknowledge their guilt."

This approach, of course, makes it difficult to understand God's response to the people's remarks - a response that seems hardly congruent with the nation's thoughts of teshuva. The Ramban therefore continues:

"'And I will hide My countenance on that day' - once again, for since Israel contemplated in their hearts that they sinned to God and that these troubles have befallen them because their God is not in their midst, it would have been appropriate, given God's immense kindness, that He will assist them and save them now that they have rejected idolatry, as it says (Yirmiyahu 2:35), 'Lo, I will bring you to judgment for saying, I have not sinned.' He therefore said that for all the great evil they committed

by placing their trust in idolatry He will further hide His countenance from them; not like the initial hiding of His countenance, when He hid the countenance of His compassion and they encountered many evils and troubles, but rather they will exist with the countenance of redemption hidden, and they will endure with the promise of the countenance of His compassion: 'Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them... ' (Vayikra 26:44), until they add onto the remorse mentioned [in the verse] an outright confession and complete repentance, as mentioned earlier (30:2): 'You shall return unto the Lord your God... '"

Meaning, this second "hastarat panim" (hiding of God's countenance) differs from the initial hastarat panim, mentioned earlier in verse 17. It is less severe and entails a certain consideration on God's part of the nation's move towards repentance. We have yet to arrive at full acceptance of the nation's teshuva, as the gravity of the sin renders it unforgivable with mere contemplation, bereft of an explicit confession and complete repentance.

But this distinction the Ramban seeks to draw between the hastarat panim of verse 18 and that of verse 17 is not even alluded to in the text. That verse 17 mentions specific punishment whereas verse 18 omits such a reference does not change the fact that both verses employ the identical term of "hastarat panim."

I therefore prefer the approach of other commentators, who interpret the nation's remarks in verse 17 as an expression of grievance and antagonism, rather than contemplation of remorse. Shadal (R. Shemuel David Luzzatto), for example, writes as follows:

"'Surely it is because our God is not in our midst' - they complain to Him that He does not look after them. He responds that the hiding of His countenance results only from their wrongdoing, and herein lies the primary intent of the shira."

Meaning, the shira intends to prevent the nation from claiming that the evils have befallen them because of a shortcoming in divine providence, and to testify that they are punished for their sins, as God had initially forewarned.

These verses thus present a dialogue in the form of a debate between the nation and God over the issue of providence, an issue that arises with the outbreak of crisis.

While this approach better accommodates the text, it, too, falls short of capturing the full meaning of the relationship between the nation's comments and God's response. This approach places the emphasis on the second part of verse 18, which adds the reason why God turned His face away from the people, which the people had failed to mention. According to this explanation, both the nation and God agree that the troubles have resulted from a lack of providence; the debate revolves around the question of why this occurred. The nation protests and claims that God turned away from them for no reason; the Almighty responds that the punishment resulted from their sins. A closer look of the verses, however, reveals that the lack of providence is

described differently in the nation's remarks and in God's response, leading us to believe that the two parties have different understandings of this phenomenon.

Rav Ovadya Seforno took note of this difference and commented as follows:

"It is because our God is not our midst that these evils have befallen us' - because He removed His Shekhina from our midst this occurred to us. When they think this, they will resort neither to prayer nor to repentance.

"And I will hide My countenance from them' - not as they thought when they said that I was not in their midst, for in fact wherever they are My Shekhina is situated there, as the Sages said, 'Wherever Israel were exiled, the Shekhina is with them.' But I will hide My countenance from saving them."

According to this interpretation, the main difference between the nation's comments and God's response involves the precise definition of the lack of providence that caused the troubles. The nation maintains that the lack of providence testifies to the fact that "God is not in our midst." God, however, informs them that what they see is merely *hester panim* - a hiding of His countenance; His Presence remains in their midst at all times.

The Seforno's emphasis on this difference between the people's claim and God's response obscures another difference. God's response adds two points: God is indeed in their midst, and the reason for His *hastarat panim* is their sinfulness.

Thus, the purpose of the shira is to testify to the nation as to the meaning of the crises that strike them. The shira testifies before the nation that it is punished for its sins and God has already warned them of the consequences of their wrongdoing. Primarily, the shira testifies that the troubles do not reflect the Shekhina's departure from the nation's midst, but merely *hastarat panim* - the hiding of God's countenance.

II. THE MISCONCEPTION OF DIVINE ABANDONMENT

Why does God deem it important to explain to the people the meaning behind the troubles, and wherein lies the danger in the mistaken notion that "it is because our God is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us"?

One answer is given in the aforementioned citation from the Seforno's commentary: "When they think this, they will resort neither to prayer nor to repentance." A nation that believes that God is not in their midst will not turn to Him in prayer or repent; after all, there is no longer anyone to whom to turn.

However, while one can certainly not question the importance of this point, neither can one deny that the verses introducing Shirat Ha'azinu make no mention of the concept of *teshuva*. Moreover, Shirat Ha'azinu itself makes no reference whatsoever to repentance, which does not

even appear as a condition to Benei Yisrael's salvation from its oppressors. The Ramban already addresses this point in his commentary (32:40).

We must conclude, therefore, that the importance of this emphasis on God's ongoing presence among His people, even when they are confronted by crisis and calamity, does not involve the ramifications concerning whether or not they turn to Him at such a time. Rather, the significance lies in the actual, precise understanding of God's relationship with His nation. The shira comes to teach the people what God's relationship with His nation is - a relationship that finds its clearest expression specifically when the nation faces crisis and trouble. If, when calamity strikes, the people think that their God is no longer in their midst, they will have made a grave error in their understanding of God's relationship to them. The shira comes to prevent such a misunderstanding and teach that one cannot speak of the Shekhina's departure from the nation's midst, but rather of *hester panim*. God's Presence forever remains among His people.

III. GOD'S UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Everything we have said until now is based on the verses that form the introduction to the shira. This brings us to the question of where this concept finds expression within the shira itself.

At first glance, the answer is simple. The shira explicitly says, "The Lord saw and was vexed and spurned His sons and His daughters. He said: I will hide My countenance from them, and see how they fare in the end" (32:19-20). The shira thus makes it perfectly clear that the punishment entails *hester panim*.

Yet it is hard to imagine that such a central concept, which constitutes the very purpose of the shira, would find expression in just one of its forty-three verses.

In the following sections, I would like to show that although the concept of *hester panim* is indeed mentioned in but a single verse, nevertheless, the idea underlying this detail, meaning, God's relationship with His nation, is the concept that forms the basis of the entire shira.

A) VERSES 7-9

We begin with a segment that describes the background to the nation's birth:

"Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past; ask your father, he will inform you, your elders, they will tell you. When the Most High gave nations their homes and set the divisions of man, He fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to Israel's numbers. For the Lord's portion is His people, Ya'akov His own allotment."
(32:7-9)

The commentaries debate the meaning of this description. According to Rashbam, the verse "He fixed the boundaries of peoples" refers to the tenth chapter of Bereishit, which outlines the settlement of Noach's sons in their respective lands. This chapter concludes, "These are the

groupings of Noach's descendants, according to their origins, by their nations; and from these the nations branched out over the earth after the flood." The linguistic parallels between our verse and the verse in Bereishit strengthen this exegetical approach, for which reason it is adopted by many other commentators, as well. The novelty of the Rashbam's explanation lies in his identifying the term "peoples" with Canaan and his sons. The Almighty "fixed" - meaning, He described in the Torah the boundary of Canaan and his sons because this territory will ultimately belong to Israel. As proof to his interpretation, the Rashbam notes that with regard to no other nation mentioned there in Bereishit does the Torah specify a boundary - only Canaan.

This verse, according to the Rashbam, stresses the fact that when the Almighty apportioned lands to the nations, He already had in mind His nation and its apportioned territory. One may find it somewhat far-fetched to view the term "amim" (peoples) as a reference to specifically the peoples of Canaan. On this point, perhaps, we may prefer Rashi's interpretation, whereby "amim" refers to all the seventy nations, and "Israel's numbers" are the seventy people of Benei Yisrael who descended from Canaan to Egypt. Accordingly, the verse here observes that God initially distributed His world among seventy peoples to correspond to the seventy souls of Benei Yisrael who comprised the fundamental core of the nation. The verse thereby stresses Am Yisrael's centrality in the world.

According to both these interpretations, verse 9 - "For the Lord's portion is His people, Ya'akov His own allotment" - provides the reason for the previous verse, emphasizing God's unique relationship God with Yisrael, as opposed to His relationship with all other peoples.

We cannot at this point overlook a different approach to this verse that emerges from a different version of the text documented in the Septuagint and in other translations, and which is found as well in a document from Qumran. This version of the text reads: "He fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to the numbers of the children of God" ("benei E-l," as opposed to, "Benei Yisrael"). This means that the seventy nations correspond to the seventy angels that constitute the divine entourage (see Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 24). According to this reading, verse 9 completes the idea of verse 8 through contrast. As opposed to those seventy nations, which correspond to the seventy angels and are under their supervision, Israel is God's portion.

I do not bring this version of the text and this interpretation to cast aspersions on the traditional text. I rather mention this exegetical tradition because it is reflected in the Targum Yerushalmi, and the idea it expresses is mentioned explicitly and developed at length by the Ramban in several places in his commentary to the Torah (primarily to Vayikra 18:25). The Ramban repeats this concept in his commentary to Ha'azinu, only in reference to a different verse, where he alludes to ours. Commenting on verse 12 - "The Lord alone did guide him and there was no alien god at his side," the Ramban writes,

"Israel has no overseer nor governor among the angelic beings who guides them or assists through his guidance, besides God Himself, for they are His portion and His allotment, as has been mentioned. And I have already written this."

Perhaps we may claim, then, that the clause, "He fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to Israel's numbers" bears a double meaning - an overt meaning and a more subtle connotation. The straightforward meaning compares, as Rashi and other commentators explain, the seventy nations with the seventy souls from which Am Yisrael was born, thereby demonstrating Benei Yisrael's centrality among the peoples of the world. The subtle meaning alludes to the distinction between the seventy nations, who are overseen by the seventy angels, and Yisrael, who are the portion of God Himself. We should also note the use of different names in reference to God in these two verses. In verse 8, where the shira describes God's relationship with the seventy peoples, the verse employs the term, "Elyon" ("Most High"), whereas in verse 9, which describes God's relationship to His nation, the shira uses the "Shem Havaya" - the Name with which God revealed Himself to Israel at the dawn of the redemption from Egypt.

In summary, these verses underscore Am Yisrael's centrality among people, and mainly God's unique relationship with them. Only Israel, as opposed to all other nations, is the portion and allotment of the Almighty. This has been established already since "the days of old," from the moment the nations came into being, and it may thus be seen as a natural law. This natural law expresses the unbreakable bond between God and His people as part of the natural reality of the existence of nations on earth. I will now attempt to show that this principle, "For the Lord's portion is His people, Ya'akov His own allotment," forms the basis of all the various sections of the shira and constitutes its primary message.

B) VERSES 10-12

The segment that follows these verses describes how God found His nation, raised it and established it:

"He found him in a desert region, in an empty howling waste. He engirded him, watched over him, guarded him as the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings, gliding down to his young, so did He spread His wings and take him, bear him along on His pinions. The Lord alone did guide him, and there was no alien god at his side." (32:10-12)

This section describes God's parental, intimate relationship towards His nation from its very inception until He brought them into the land. This intimate relationship is particularly stressed at the conclusion of this segment - "The Lord alone did guide him, and there was alien god at his side," which parallels the conclusion of the previous segment - "For the Lord's portion is His people, Ya'akov His own allotment." The previous segment emphasized the nation's exclusivity with respect to the Almighty, whereas here the shira underscores God's exclusivity with respect to the nation.

This segment omits several seminal events in the history of Am Yisrael's formation, such as the Exodus and the Revelation at Sinai. It instead portrays Benei Yisrael's inception as occurring when God found them in the wilderness - a point that already troubled the classical commentators.

To explain this description, let us begin with the reason for the verse's omission of the Exodus from Egypt. The verse seeks to emphasize the kindness God bestowed upon His nation, in order to form a contrast with the shira's later description of the nation's ingratitude. The primary bestowal of kindness described later is God's having granted His nation a land flowing with milk and honey. This act of kindness is depicted in the following section in great detail and with a particularly graphic description. As the contrasting background for this illustration, the shira emphasizes at the beginning of verse 10 the nation's initial condition, likened here to the period of childhood, before the Almighty spread His wings over it. At this stage, the nation was in a desert land in an empty howling waste, in a place where it had no possible way of fending for itself. Egypt, a prosperous, populated region, is not suitable for this description - even if Benei Yisrael were there as slaves. This stark contrast places the land at the center of God's kindness to His nation, and this detail connects to the allusion in the previous segment that mentioned "the boundaries of peoples." The seventy nations, whom God did not choose as His portion, were assigned boundaries that need not be specified nor have their qualities described. But Yisrael, God's portion, will receive a suitable boundary, a land specifically designated for God's nation, a land whose qualities will be outlined in great detail in the following section. The land will earn mention once more at the shira's conclusion - "and He will cleanse the land for His people." Thus the Land of Israel assumes a prominent role within Shirat Ha'azinu.

A slightly different factor warranted the omission of the giving of the Torah. As stated, verses 10-11 describe God's parental relationship with His nation, which is compared here to a young child or small bird in need of support, care and nurturing. Clearly, within the framework of this poetic depiction of how God supported and raised His nation, an event such as the giving of the Torah, which bears an entirely different meaning, has no place. Later, however, we will discover a deeper meaning for the omission of the giving of the Torah.

C) VERSES 13-14

In the next segment, consisting of verses 13-14, the shira describes in detail the nation's entry into the land and enjoyment of its produce. Earlier we addressed this detail and its importance.

This concludes the topic of God's relationship towards His people. The primary element of this entire description, including all its various segments, is the emphasis on God's parental relationship with His nation, particularly the uniqueness of this bond. Just as Yisrael is God's portion and can be exchanged for no other nation, similarly, "The Lord alone did guide him, and there was no alien god at his side."

D) VERSES 15-18

At this point, the shira proceeds to describe, in verses 15-18, Israel's ingratitude to its God. The only sins mentioned here involve the abandonment of God and the worship of demons. We should note that the shira does not describe these sins as violations of the commands of "I am the

Lord your God" or "You shall not have any other gods." After all, these commands were never mentioned anywhere earlier in the shira. Instead, these sins are described as an expression of ingratitude towards the God who found His nation back in its childhood, raised it and brought it into the land. The verses emphasize the nation's rejection of the God who created it: "He forsook the God who made him and spurned the Rock of his support." This segment similarly concludes, "You neglected the Rock that begot you, forgot the God who brought you forth."

Thus, Shirat Ha'azinu does not depict the bond between God and His nation in terms of the observance or violation of Torah and mitzvot. Rather, Shirat Ha'azinu hinges this relationship on the more basic issue of God's kindness towards the nation that He begot, fashioned, established, raised, and brought into its land. Against this background, Am Yisrael's ingratitude is highlighted. The shira therefore makes no mention of the Revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Torah, because it accuses Benei Yisrael not of violating God's commands, but rather of ingratitude. The basis of the shira is thus moral.

E) VERSES 19-25

The following segment - verses 19-25 - describe God's anger and the punishment He will unleash against His nation. I already mentioned that at the center of this segment stands the clause, "I will hide My countenance from them, and see how they fare in the end," and I explained that the shira thereby emphasizes that God conceals His face but does not remove His Shekhina. In light of the background that the shira has sketched until now, this point is indeed the conclusion we would expect. The bond created between God and His people is a bond that can never be broken. For good reason the shira employs the image of a father (verse 6) and children (verses 5, 19, 20): the relationship between parent and child can never be broken.

F) VERSES 26-35

In the next section, which occupies verses 26-35, the possibility is raised of intensifying the punishment to the point of the people's eradication from memory: "I said I will annihilate them, make their memory cease among men." The verses proceed to explain the reason why this plan was never actualized.

This segment might appear to contradict our approach to the purpose of the shira, as explaining to the people the reason and meaning behind their suffering. Here, however, the possibility of the nation's total destruction is raised. How, then, can we speak about hester panim as opposed to the Shekhina's departure?

We may respond to this question with two answers, which essentially amount to a single answer. First, hester panim does not prevent the nation's eradication from memory. In principle, God can hide His countenance until the enemies bring about the harshest punishment upon Am Yisrael. Secondly, this segment comes specifically to say that although the nation's annihilation was considered as an appropriate response to its ingratitude, it never actually occurred. The verse

deals mainly not with the punishment that could have surfaced, but with the fact that such a punishment will never surface.

Why can't such a punishment be actualized? The shira gives the following response: "... but for the fear of the taunts of the foe, their enemies who might misjudge and say, 'Our own hand has prevailed; none of this was wrought by the Lord!'" This response requires explanation. Shall justice be suspended due to the foolish claim of the oppressors?

The Ramban addresses this question at length in his commentary to verse 26. In short, he explains that Am Yisrael is the only nation that publicizes God's name to the world. Its destruction would undermine the very purpose of creation - the proclamation of God's name - and therefore can never happen.

This important theory can be proven from several sources in Tanakh, but we will encounter great difficulty finding any expression of it in Shirat Ha'azinu. We may perhaps connect this passage, too, to the basic idea conveyed by the shira. As we have said, the basic concept emphasized by the shira is God's unique relationship with His nation - "For the Lord's portion is His people, Ya'akov His own allotment." This relationship may lead the nations to conclude, "Our own hand has prevailed; none of this was wrought by the Lord," for they have defeated His nation. Moreover, the words, "Our own hand has prevailed" are directed, in one sense, towards the heavens: they have defeated not only the nation, but also that nation's God, as it were. According to this interpretation, this segment, too, which tells of the impossibility of the nation's destruction, itself results from the fact that "the Lord's portion is His people." Thus, even if the period of punishment is characterized by hester panim, the Shekhina has never departed.

G) VERSES 39-39

In the following segment, verses 36-39, God announces the end of the calamity: "For the Lord will vindicate His people and take revenge for His servants." The verse's conclusion gives the reason: "for He will see that their might is gone, and neither bond nor free is left." As we noted earlier, we do not find here a reference to teshuva as a precondition for redemption, nor do we have here any mention of prayer or crying to God. I believe this is the only instance in the entire Torah where salvation does not depend at all on the nation's conduct, but solely on divine compassion.

It stands to reason that this, too, serves to underscore the relationship between God and His people. Since "The Lord's portion is His people," and since the Almighty is "the Father who created you, who fashioned you and made you endure," He naturally shows compassion to His children when He sees that their might is gone and neither bond nor free is left. The Father asks only that the children acknowledge that "I, I am He; there is no god beside Me" (39).

H) VERSES 40-43

The final segment, spanning verses 40-43, concludes the shira with a description of God's vengeance against His foes. This description is very graphic and expresses deep, emotional involvement on God's part, as it were, in what the enemies have done to His people. This requires explanation. Even more perplexing is the fact that the shira concludes with God's vengeance against His enemies rather than the salvation of Israel.

At first glance, we could perhaps explain that the assault against Israel's foes in essence amounts to Israel's salvation. The punishment described in the shira involved not exile, but rather the overpowering of Am Yisrael in its land by other nations. Consequently, the fall of the enemies de facto liberates Benei Yisrael from their oppression. But this provides only a partial answer. The description with which the shira concludes tells not only of the assault against the enemy to free Israel, but of revenge, God's arrows becoming drunk with blood and the devouring of the enemy's flesh by God's sword. All this clearly alludes to a catastrophe well beyond that which is necessary for the liberation of Am Yisrael.

It would seem that this segment, too, relates to the basic message of the shira. The close bond between God and His nation has not been outwardly expressed throughout the period of Benei Yisrael's punishment. It had appeared as though Israel had no protection from its foes. Moreover, it appeared to the foes themselves that as Benei Yisrael fell, the name of God, as it were, fell, as well. The shira informs us that throughout the entire period of hester panim, the relationship between God and His people remained intact. The Almighty kept with Him a record of the oppressors' sins: "Lo, I have it all put away, sealed up in My storehouses, to be My vengeance and recompense, at the time that their foot falters" (34-35). Israel's enemies have turned into God's enemies - "Vengeance will I wreak on My foes, will I deal to those who reject Me" (41).

The calamity that God brings upon His enemies comes to prove to the nations that there is One who is zealous for His nation and land. "Then the Lord was zealous on behalf of His land and had compassion upon His people" (Yoel 2:18). This zealousness bears deep, emotional significance and entails an element of personal involvement, as it were. The Almighty takes revenge on those who inflict harm on His people. This zealousness repairs the damage caused to God's bond with His people, and it proves that indeed, "The Lord's portion is His people."

"O nations, acclaim His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, wreak vengeance on His foes, and atone the land for His people." This "acclaim" that the nations are called upon to sing in the wake of God's having avenged the blood of His servants on the one hand, and His having wreaked vengeance on His foes on the other - this acclaim is in essence the nations' confession that, indeed, "When the Most High gave nations their homes and set the divisions of man, He fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to Israel's numbers. For the Lord's portion is His people, Ya'akov His own allotment." There is no greater praise for Israel than this confession of the nations which results from God's revenge. It testifies that the nations indeed acknowledge that the Lord's portion is His people, and this is God's "atonement" for what has happened to His land and His people.

This verse is indeed worthy of concluding the entire shira, and the words "admato amo" - literally, "His land, His people" - are indeed worthy of concluding this verse.

In light of this meaning behind Shirat Ha'azinu, it is only natural that this is the only parasha that God commands Moshe to write, to teach Benei Yisrael, and to place in their mouths. It is the only section in the Torah that we are promised "will never be lost from the mouth of their offspring." The unbreakable bond between the Almighty and His people described in the shira ought to be engraved for eternity both in writing and orally, such that it is never forgotten. Once the foundation will never be forgotten - we are assured that the entire building, too, will always remain intact.

"For the Lord will never abandon His people, for the sake of His great Name, for the Lord undertook to make you His people." (I Shemuel 12:22)

(Translated by David Silverberg)