

PARASHAT HASHAVUA

PARASHAT VAYELEKH

The Song of *Ha'azinu*

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I

The poem known as *Shirat Ha'azinu*, the Song of *Ha'azinu* (32:1-43), opens with an invocation of the heavens and earth. In an obvious echo of the very first verse of the Torah declaiming the creation of the world (*Bereishit* 1:1), Moshe summons the ultimate audience:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak
And hear O earth, the words of My mouth (32:1)

This eternal audience is summoned to do more than just merely listen. As the verses preceding the start of the poem make abundantly clear, the heavens and earth serve as witnesses. In instructing the Levites to summon the people for the teaching of the poem, Moshe states the following:

Gather to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to witness against them. (31:28)

In point of fact, the heavens and earth are not the primary, or even intended audience of *Shirat Ha'azinu*. Just before recording the song, the Torah informs us that Moshe "spoke" the "words" of this song in the "ears" of the entire community of Israel (31:30). It is the "ears" of the Children of Israel, the elders, the officers and the community members that must hear the "speaking" and the "words." The heavens and earth are summoned to listen along, to bear witness to the song, its contents and its transmission to the Children of Israel.

Yet there is more to it than this. As the just cited verse specifies, the heaven and earth are summoned to "witness against them (*ve-a'eida bam*)," i.e. to bear witness or testify against the elders, or perhaps people, of Israel. The eternal heavens and earth function as more than an eternal forum, a mighty, forbidding and absolute context for the weighty words of *Shirat Ha'azinu*. Their witnessing is more than an awe-inspiring, yet passive context. Rather, in the metaphor of the poem and its context, the witnessing of the

song and its contents constitutes an active moment, an act of testimony, or a preface to an act of testimony, oriented over and against the Children of Israel. Although practically mute, the heavens and earth speak eloquently against the Children of Israel.

This function of "witnessing" seems to be textually related to the "witness" function of the song itself. In first instructing Moshe to write down the poem, to teach it to the Children of Israel and "place it in their mouths" (31:19), God provides the following rationale:

...So that this poem may be a witness for Me against the Children of Israel.
(31:19)

Similarly, God later states that the poem "will answer to them as a witness" (31:21), and in instructing the Levites to take the just written poem and place it next to the Ark of the Covenant, Moshe claims that it will "be there a witness" (31:26). Finally, immediately upon completing his teaching of the poem to the Children of Israel, Moshe commands the people to "set your hearts to all the words which I witness (*mei'id*) among you this day" (31:46). The poem itself, in both its spoken and written forms, constitutes words of witnessing, an ongoing testimony.

To put this together, on the conceptual plane, the invocation of the heavens and earth, the witnessing by the heavens and earth, should be viewed as part and parcel of a larger "witnessing" theme. The song itself, in both its current and future forms, in its spoken and taught, as well as written and stored, forms constitutes an act of witnessing/testimony against the Children of Israel. In line with this function of the song, the heavens and earth are adduced as an additional pair of witnesses. In parallel to the written form of the song contained in the Torah, and placed beside the ark, the heavens and earth stand as an eternal testimony to the contents of the song they witnessed. As such, they too "witness against" the Children of Israel.

This brings us to the nub of the matter. While the heavens and earth as well as the text of the poem may serve as witnesses "against" the Children of Israel (31:19, 21, 26, 29), how they do so, how the contents of the poem stand against the Children of Israel remains completely unclear. In other words, we have yet to unpack the contents of the testimony, to paraphrase the language of the text; we have yet to "give ear" and "hear" the words of the song.

Yet this problem, the what and how of the testimony is only part of the problem implicit in the identity of the song as "testimony." As pointed out above, God commands Moshe to commit the song to writing and teach it to the Children of Israel so that the song may serve as witness (31:19). Shortly thereafter, the Torah reports that Moshe did exactly such, both writing and teaching the song (31:22). At this point, the Torah seems to leave off the topic of "this song" (31:19, 21, 22) and in somewhat of a digression switches to the topic of "this Torah." The text informs us that:

And it was when Moshe finished writing the words of **this Torah** in a book until their end (*ad tumam*). And Moshe commanded the Levites who bore the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord saying, Take **this** book of the **Torah** and put it alongside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God that it may be there among you/against you for a witness.
(31:24-26)

Based upon the third appearance of the term "witness" in the space of a few short verses (31:19, 21, 26) and the witnessing function of "this Torah," we should correlate "this Torah" with "this song" (31:19, 21, 22). The just cited text is neither a digression nor a change of topic, and the Torah placed alongside the ark is in fact *Shirat Ha'azinu*. To be slightly more accurate, it is the Torah previously written by Moshe (31:9), plus the new addition of *Shirat Ha'azinu*. Where as previously the text described Moshe as writing "this Torah" (31:9), the text now depicts Moshe as writing the words of "this Torah" until "their end" (31:26), i.e. writing the Torah along with the new addition of *Shirat Ha'azinu*. Apparently, the Torah is not complete without *Shirat Ha'azinu*.

Moreover, the Song of *Ha'azinu* seems to define a new aspect of the Torah. A parallel between the two reports of Torah writing found in the text should help clarify this point.

Previously, in reporting the writing of the Torah, the text informs us of a three-part process culminating in a functional goal (31:9-13). First Moshe writes down "this Torah" (31:9). Second, he entrusts the just written Torah to the *Kohanim/Levites*, "the bearers of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord." Finally, he "commands them" (31:10) and the leaders of Israel regarding the public teaching of the Torah so that future generations "will learn and fear the Lord" and "keep the words of the Torah" (31:10-13). In parallel, the Torah's report of Moshe's writing of the Torah "*ad tumam* – until their end," the second report of the Torah's writing (31:24-26), possesses the same three-part structure and textual markers. After writing down "this Torah" (31:24), Moshe transfers the just written Torah to the Levites, described as: "The bearers of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord" (31:25-26). Once again, in the third part of the parallel structure he "commands them" (31:25). But as opposed to a public ceremony of Torah teaching designed to instill knowledge, awe and observance, Moshe commands the housing of the Torah alongside the ark as "a witness" (31:26). Apparently, the addition of *Shirat Ha'azinu* defines a new and different aspect to the written Torah. In addition to its regular identity and first function as teaching it now carries a new identity and role. The Torah has become a "witness."

In sum, the identity of the Song of *Ha'azinu* as a "witness" raises a series of interrelated questions. First and foremost we may duly wonder regarding the content and purpose of the testimony. To what does *Shirat Ha'azinu* testify, and for what purpose? Second, in an unexpected twist, the witness identity of the poem imparts a new flavor to the written text of the Torah. It defines a new identity, or additional identity, to the Torah itself. In both the textual-technical and essential-philosophical senses, without *Ha'azinu* and its unique identity, the Torah is partial and unfinished. But in what sense do the Song

of *Ha'azinu* and its witness function complete the Torah? In what sense does it bring the Torah and its teaching "*ad tumam* – until their end"?

II

In *Sefer Devarim*, the term "*eid*," meaning "witness," or its plural formulation, the term "*eidim*," usually appears in a judicial context. *Devarim* 19:15 famously teaches that "a single witness cannot establish" guilt or blame for any offense that may be committed. Rather, "by two witnesses or more can the matter be established" (19:15). In other words, the normal function of a witness or witnesses in the Book of *Devarim* is to indict, establish guilt and convict. By implication, the testimony of *Shirat Ha'azinu*, the "witness" function of the song, serves the same purpose. In serving as a "witness against the Children of Israel" (31:19), the poem indicts, establishes the guilt of, and convicts the Children of Israel.

A quick look at the complete passage that first introduces the "witnessing" imagery should help clarify the point. God's full instructions to Moshe for the writing and teaching of the poem (31:19-21) read as follows:

And now therefore write this poem for yourselves and teach it to the Children of Israel. Put it in their mouths that this poem may be a **witness** for me against the Children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them to into the land of which I swore to the forefathers, one flowing with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat; then they will turn to other gods, and serve them and **spurn me** (*ve-ni'atzuni*). And when many **evils** (*ra'ot*) and troubles have befallen them, this poem shall answer against them as a **witness**...for I know their inclination and what it does today, even now, before I have brought them into the land... (31:19-21)

Following the introduction of the command to write the poem and an accompanying mention of the "witnessing" rationale (31:19), the text describes a multi-part process. Upon entering the good and rich land, the people will become "fat" (31:20). In step two of the process, the people will engage in idol worship; in the language of the text, they will "turn to other gods" and "spurn" God Himself (31:20). As effect follows cause, in step-three of the process many "evils" and "troubles" will befall the people. They have turned away from God, and suffer the consequences. Finally, in what we may identify as a "witnessing" frame, the text follows with another mention of the poem's function as a "witness" (31:21). This may be charted as follows.

Opening	Witness function	31:19
Stage one	Enter land, get fat	31:20
Stage two	Turn to other gods	31:20
Stage three	Evils/difficulties	31:20
Closing	Witness function	31:21

Apparently, the "witnessing" function of the poem, its indictment and conviction of the Children of Israel, is related to the historical story of satiation, idol worship and suffering that lies at the heart of God's command to Moshe to record the poem.

By no surprise, this very same historical story of satiation, idol worship and suffering lies at the heart of the poem itself. At a certain point in its unfolding, the poem takes up the topic of the past. While a detailed discussion of the structure of *Shirat Ha'azinu* lies beyond the scope of our current analysis, what may be termed the "second segment" (32:13-18) of the second – or "historical" part of *Ha'azinu* (32:7-25) – opens as follows:

He set him atop the high places of the land
To eat the produce of the fields
He fed him honey from the crag
And oil from the flinty rock,
Curd of kine and milk (*chalev*) of flocks;
With fat (*chailev*) of lambs
And rams of Bashan and goats
With the fat of kidneys of wheat
And foaming grape blood was your drink
But Yeshurun grew fat and kicked
You are grown fat, you are thick with fat, you are covered with fat
(32:13-15)

The references to "land," "honey," and "milk" woven into the historical tapestry of the poem, as well as the mention of fields, wheat, and grapes (32:13-14), indicate that the Children of Israel have now entered the land promised to the forefathers. Where as before God had "found them" in the "desert," in a "howling wasteland" (32:10), He has now led them to the land flowing with milk and honey promised to the forefathers (31:30). As previously predicted, all does not go as it should. The simple nourishment of produce, honey, oil, curds and milk mutates to a richer diet. The term "*chalev*," meaning milk, slides into the term "*chailev*," animal fat. Lambs, rams, goats, wheat as rich as the "fat of kidneys," and wine as rich as "blood" become the normal fare.

In a magnificent metaphor, the Children of Israel, poetically termed "Yeshurun," are depicted as one of the fat animals they have gorged themselves on. They are thick and swollen, covered in layers of their own desires and satiation. They "kick." Fat, recalcitrant animal they are, they rebel against their master. The text continues on:

Then he forsook God who made him
And scorned the Rock of His support
They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods
With abominations they provoked Him to anger
They sacrificed to non-gods; to gods they knew not
To new gods that came newly up
Of whom your forefathers feared not

Of the Rock that begot you, you are unmindful
And have forgotten the Lord that formed you.
(32:15-18)

In stage two of the satiation-idol worship-suffering pattern, the Children of Israel "forsake God," "scorn the Rock" (32:15), are "unmindful" of their Rock, and "forget" the Lord (32:18). In between, in opposition to the four mentions of the true God, *Shirat Ha'azinu* four times describes satiated, rebellious Yeshurun as engaged with "strange gods," sacrificing to "non-gods," "gods they knew not," and worshipping the most modern, newest possible gods (32:16-17). The Children of Israel turn from God and turn to other gods.

At this point, the text transitions to God's reaction. The third segment (32:19-25) of the larger "historical" portion of *Shirat Ha'azinu* opens with the following lines:

And the Lord saw and was vexed
And spurned His sons and daughters
He said: I will hide My face from them
I will see what their end shall be
For they are a treacherous breed
Children with no loyalty in them
(32:19-20)

God's response to being forsaken and scorned by His sons and daughters is harsh. He too shall turn away. His anger burns against His children.

For a fire is kindled in my anger
And burns to the bottom of the Sheol
It shall consume the land and its produce
Eat down to the foundations of the mountains
I will gather evils (*raot*) upon them
I will spend My arrows upon them
Wasting famine, ravaging plague,
Deadly pestilence, and fanged beasts
Will I let against them
With venomous crawling things in the dust
(32:22-25)

But this, of course, completes the pattern of satiation/idol worship/suffering described earlier. Satiation leads the Children of Israel to rebel, to abandon God and worship other foreign and false deities. In His anger and wrath, God brings a variety of "*raot* – evils" upon His disloyal people.

To put this together, much of the main body of *Shirat Ha'azinu* (32:13-25) constitutes an expansion of the satiation/idol worship/suffering pattern already mentioned at the center of God's command to Moshe to record the poem (31:20-21). The sundry and

frightening "evils" of famine, plague, pestilence and poisonous beast mentioned in the song are just the expanded version of the "evils" already foreshadowed in God's command to Moshe (31:21). They result from the satiation/idol worship process. They constitute the logical and inevitable end of the process of abandoning God.

It is this pattern the song bears witness to. In prophesying the evils which will eventually befall the Children of Israel, the song serves to warn the people both now and in the future. Moreover, besides serving as a warning, the song plays an explanatory role in future history, after the foretold evils have befallen the people. As emphasized, the song explains the evils as a result of the people's actions. To be precise, it details their disloyalty and ingratitude (32:6, 17, 20), the people's turning to foreign gods (32:15-18), and depicts their suffering as the fruits of the ultimate act of ingratitude after receiving a rich and bountiful land (32:13-15). In other words the song places the blame for the evils that befall them squarely on the shoulders of the Children of Israel. It serves to indict, establish the guilt of and convict the Children of Israel.

III

Let us return to God's original command to Moshe. Focusing on the particulars of the language should help uncover another aspect of the "witnessing" theme. As cited earlier, in formulating the original "witnessing" function of *Shirat Ha'azinu*, God states the following.

...So that this poem may be a witness for Me against the Children of Israel (31:19)

The song serves not just as a witness "against" the Children of Israel (31:21, 26), a testimony of their guilt, but also "for Me," i.e. as a witness for God. While we may be inclined to gloss over the terminology and claim that "for Me" should be interpreted as "on behalf of the prosecution," a kind of alternative formulation for "against," this would probably be an error.

In general, witnesses serve not just to convict one party, but also to vindicate another party's version of events. In determining the guilt of the guilty, they define the case and cause of the other side as just and right. At the very least, even in cases where no adversarial party is present, and the accused stands alone against the court, witnesses serve to guarantee the justice of the court's verdict. Proper procedure has been followed, guilt has been established, and the court's verdict is just.

Shirat Ha'azinu is no different. Just as the song determines the guilt of the Children of Israel, so too it testifies to the justice of the other party, i.e. the case and cause of God, the justice of God and His ways. The song serves as a witness for the side of God, in God's language, "for Me" (31:19).

A look at the text preceding God's command to Moshe to record the song should help clarify the conceptual significance of this point. Before commanding Moshe to write

and teach, God informs Moshe that after his death the people will stray after the foreign gods of the land, abandon Him (*ve-azavani*) and flout His covenant (31:16). In exchange, in measure for measure fashion, God states that He will abandon them (*va-azavtim*) (31:17), and

I will hide my face from them (*ve-histarti panai*) from them, and they shall be devoured and many evils (*ra'ot*) and troubles shall befall them; and they shall say on that day: Are not these evils (*ra'ot*) come upon us because God is not among us (*be-kirbi*)? And I will surely hide my face (*haster astir panai*) on that day due to all the evil (*kol ha-ra'a*) that they have done, for they have turned (*pana*) to other gods (31:17-18)

Upon being confronted with the various evils that befall them, the people will claim that their suffering is due to God not being amongst them, i.e. not with them and providentially providing for their success (*Devarim* 1:42). While this can be interpreted as a mere statement of fact by the future generation, a diagnosis of a historical reality, it probably should be interpreted as something more robust, as a strong theological claim.

The text (31:17) uses the term "*be-kirbi*," a term that has been enunciated before by the Children of Israel. *Shemot* 17:7 teaches that shortly after leaving Egypt, at the place known as Masa U-meriva, the Children of Israel tested God. They "tested the Lord saying: Is the Lord amongst us (*be-kirbeinu*) or not?" Faced with the harsh desert conditions, the Children of Israel doubted God's abilities to provide for them. Alternatively, they wondered whether God indeed cared for them and would sustain them in the desert. Either way, in light of *Sefer Devarim's* prohibition to "test the Lord your God as you did at Masa" (6:16), the very act of questioning whether God "is amidst" the Children of Israel constitutes a sin. It constitutes an act of questioning God's Providence, His abilities, His care for the Children of Israel and His loyalty to His people. In this light, the stating that God is not amongst them (*be-kirbi*) by the future generation takes on a whole new dimension. It comprises an accusation against God, the claim that He has abandoned His people and/or the questioning of His Providence and capabilities.

The people are in fact correct. God is not amongst them, and His providential protection has been removed. Yet they do not understand. As the language of the text cited above should make clear, the removal of God's Providence from the people is an act that conforms to the balanced parameters of "measure for measure." God abandons the people (*va-azavtim*) (31:17) in response to the people's abandoning of God (*va-azavani*) (31:16).

Similarly, the technical term used by the text to connote the removal of God's Providence is "*hesteir panim*," literally the "hiding of face" (31:17-18). God's face, or the face-to-face relationship with God implied by God's showing His face, are synonymous with God's attention, Providence and caring. Turning away or hiding of His face connotes the opposite. Yet God only "hides" or "turns away," only breaks the face-to-face relation, after the Children of Israel have themselves "turned." God only conceals His "face – *panai*" (31:17-18) in response to the Children of Israel's "turning – *pana*" to other gods

(31:18). It is they who have turned, hidden and broken the face-to-face relation. In sum, and in yet another linguistic emphasis of the "measure for measure" theme, the "evils/ra'ot" that befall the people (31:17,17) are no more than the result and equal reaction of "all the evils (*kol ha-ra'a*)" done by the people (31:18).

To no surprise, the song itself continues the development of the "measure for measure" imagery. In between its mention of God's decision to "hide His face" from His children (32:20) and the catalogue of horrors (32:22-25) embodied in the term "evils/ra'ot" (32:23), *Shirat Ha'azinu* records God as declaring the following:

They **incensed me** with **no-gods** (*kinuni be-lo el*)
Vexed me (*chi'asuni*) with their futilities
I will **incense them** with a **no-people** (*akni'eim be-lo am*)
Vex them (*achisa'im*) with a vile nation (32:21)

In accord with the principles of justice, God's reaction is measure for measure.

In sum, in indicting the people and testifying as to their guilt, *Shirat Ha'azinu* serves as a powerful testament to the justice of God's ways. The evils that befall the people and the removal of God's providential attention are but mere measured, balanced and appropriate actions of measure for measure justice. The "witnessing" of the song serves not only to convict the Children of Israel, but to vindicate the justness of God's case and the justice of His ways. In the words of the song found in its opening invocation (32:1-6) that establish this central theme:

The Rock – His deeds are perfect
For all His ways are just
A faithful God never false
Righteous and upright is He (32:4)

IV

Before closing, let us turn our attention to the second issue raised earlier, the dimension of "witnessing" that *Shirat Ha'azinu* contributes to the written Torah. While our analysis has dealt extensively with the nature of the "witnessing" function of the song, little has been said regarding the song's integration with the remainder of the Torah: the sense of the Torah as incomplete without *Ha'azinu*, and its transformation of the entire written Torah into a witness (31:26). While the aspects of witnessing mapped until this point, conviction of the Children of Israel and testimony to God's justice, may be sufficient to complete the circle, I would like to argue that the problem may point to a third and different sense of witnessing present in the song.

As argued previously at least implicitly, part of the purpose of *Shirat Ha'azinu* is to respond to what might be termed "the problem of *hesteir panim*." In short, God is not present, and His people suffer. The problem is both theological and existential. On the theological plane, the people's suffering seems inexplicable, without precedent and

without cause. God's ways are unjust, and/or He has abandoned His people. On this theological plane, the song testifies, i.e. presents the argument, that the people are guilty, their suffering is deserved, and that God's ways are just. God's abandoning of His people and/or anger is theologically justified. Yet this is not the only issue. The very state of "*hesteir panim*," of God's turning away, strikes us as unbearable if not impossible. On the existential and religious plane, such a state constitutes a state of absolute loss, alienation from all that is holy and the ultimate notion of meaningless being. It is, in fact, a kind of non-being. A fate, national life, and world without God.

Yet it is precisely such a perception of "*hesteir panim*" that much of *Shirat Ha'azinu* comes to negate. For example, let us consider the following passage, found near the beginning of the second and "historical" segment of the poem (32:7-25).

For the Lord's portion is His people
Yaakov is the lot of His inheritance
He found him in a desert land
In an empty howling waste
He led him about
He instructed him
He kept him as the apple of His eye
Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings
Gliding down to his young
So did he spread his wings and take him
Bearing them along on his pinions
So the Lord alone did lead him...
(32:9-11)

God engages in a special and unique relationship with His people, they are His portion and inheritance. He has rescued them, raised them, treasured them and protected them. Like a mother eagle transporting and protecting her young, He has transported, protected and led the Children of Israel, His children.

On a like note, in parallel to the mother eagle imagery, *Shirat Ha'azinu* makes extensive use of parent-child imagery. Upon bringing His young to the land, He "makes him suckle (*va-yanikeihu*)" honey from a rock (32:13). The nursing imagery cannot be missed. The land of milk and honey is the means by which God nurses His young. In an even more daring play of images, the poem uses the term "rock" (*tzur*), a term first used to describe God Himself in the poem (32:4), and used seven times throughout the poem as a reference to divine power (32:4,16,18,30,31,31,37), to describe the object from which the infant Israel suckles its nourishment (32:13). While the term means no more the physical rocks of the land, it also means much more. It captures the near physical parent-child relation between God and Israel. Similarly, throughout the poem, even in deriding the Children of Israel, and even in its horrifying and horrible "*hesteir panim*" segments, the song consistently refers to the people as the sons and daughters of God (32:5,19,20). God is their father and maker, or the one Who has begotten them (32:6,18).

All this forces the following rhetorical question upon us: Can a parent really turn away from a child? The answer is of course no. And this is precisely the point that *Shirat Ha'azinu* wants us to realize. Given the history of the God-Israel relation, the intensity, the love, the caring and the nurturing, *hesteir panim* is no more than a misconception, at most a temporary state, or perhaps even an illusion.

This point is also readily apparent from the overall structure of the song and its culmination. A simplified version of the structure can be charted as follows.

Part 1 32:1-6	Introduction, justice of God's ways
Part 2.1 32:7-12	History, God's choosing of and special relation with Israel
Part 2.2 32:13-18	History, God's nourishing of Israel, satiation, fatness, idol worship
Part 2.3 32:19-25	History, God's reaction, <i>hesteir panim</i> , the punishment of Israel
Part 3.1 32:26-35	God's decision to be lenient with the Children of Israel, Degradation of the enemies of Israel as evil, Promise to take vengeance upon the enemies
Part 3.2 32:36-43	God's promise to judge/have mercy upon His people, the supremacy of God and the healing of His people, bloody vengeance against His enemies and forgiveness for His land and people

As should be seen from the chart above, as the poem moves into its latter stages, the topic and tone undergo a shift. Gradually, the focus of God's justice and vengeance moves from His children to the enemy nations. To quote but one example, by the last segment of the song, part 3.2 above, in a declaration of his absolute supremacy, God proclaims the following:

For I lift up My hand to Heaven
 And say: I live forever
 If I whet My glittering sword
 And My hand takes hold of judgment
 I will render vengeance to My enemies...
 (32:40-41)

Moreover, as Part 3.1, the first subsection of part three, makes clear, all that has happened is a result of God's providential involvement (32:27-30). Finally, and most importantly, in Part 3.2, the closing segment of the poem, God refers to the Children of Israel as "His people," or "servants" (32:36,43), and promises to avenge them, to heal them and have mercy upon them (32:26, 39, 43).

In sum, the horrors of *heseir panim* (32:19-25), Part 2.3 of the song, are bracketed by the past and the future. On the one side stands the caring and nurturing of God for His children, and on the other hand stands His continued loyalty, His promises of healing and mercy, and swearing of vengeance against the common enemies of the Children of Israel and their God. All that has happened constitutes no more than a brief interlude, a brief moment of anger and retribution, in the ongoing trans-historic covenantal relationship of God and Israel. In fact, the suffering of "*heseir panim*" is in fact no more than a brief stage in the relationship, and the "absence" of God no more than a temporary and misleading illusion. This too constitutes part of the testimony of *Shirat Ha'azinu*. It is a testimony to the eternal and everlasting covenantal relationship between God and Israel.

To close the circle, let us return to the term "*eid*," the idea of witnessing, and the placement of *Shirat Ha'azinu* alongside the Ark of the Covenant, and the integration of *Shirat Ha'azinu* into the overarching purpose of the Torah. While the Torah is teaching, a guide to life, it is also testimony. The ark, known as the Ark of the Covenant (*Aron Ha-brit*) (31:9, 26), is also known as the "*Aron Ha-eidut*," the ark of testimony (*Shemot* 26:33, 40:3). Both these names derive from the fact that ark contains the *luchot*, the two stone tablets given at Sinai, also known as the *luchot ha-brit*, the tablets of the covenant (9:9,11). The *luchot* constitute the physical embodiment, a record, of the covenant between God and Israel. The *luchot* and the ark containing them constitute a system of "*eidut*," of testimony or testament to the covenantal relationship between God and Israel made at Sinai.

But this is also the ultimate purpose of the "*eidut*," the testimony or testament of *Shirat Ha'azinu*. Placed alongside the ark it testifies to the eternal covenantal relationship between God and Israel, one originating in the distant past and destined to continue on forever. On some level, without the message of *Shirat Ha'azinu*, the Torah is not yet complete. *Shirat Ha'azinu* reminds us that in fact, on some level, the entire Torah is but the story of the covenantal relationship of God and Israel, originating in the past and destined to continue on until the end of days.

Further Study

- 1) The *shiur* above presents three interrelated approaches to the purpose of *Shirat Ha'azinu* based upon its status as witness/testimony. A) See Ramban 32:40 (latter part of comment). Formulate his theory as to the purpose of *Shirat Ha'azinu*. Is it in fact different than the third approach presented in the *shiur*? Analyze the *Sifri* cited by Ramban. B) Read 32:45-47. Do these verses hint at an additional alternative? Are the prophecies of the song inevitable? C) Read 30:1-10. Now reread 32:26-43. What is missing from *Shirat Ha'azinu*? Try to formulate an explanation in light of the end of the *shiur* above.
- 2) Reread 32:1 and 31:28. See Rashbam, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra 1:1. Now see 11:13-17 and 17:6-7. What difficulty are the Rashbam and Rashi attempting to resolve?

Explain their solution. Contrast it with the solution suggested at beginning of the *shiur*.

3) Read 31:7-13. Now read 31:14-30. Try to note the structure of each section and the parallels between the two. Note how God's version (31:14-30) differs from Moshe's version (31:7-13). Now see 32:44-47. Does Moshe fully accept God's pessimistic perspective? Evaluate this point in light of the different perspectives on the song developed in the *shiur* and in the questions for further study

4) Reread 31:16-19. See Ramban 31:17-18. Note how the Ramban interprets these verses in contrast to the interpretation presented in the *shiur* above. Now see the Ramban's comments to 31:21 and 31:40 (again). Try to formulate a unified theory explaining the Ramban's approach to *Shirat Ha'azinu*.