

MANKIND'S SONG

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The final song of Moshe begins in this week's parsha of Haazinu. The song concludes with Vzot Habracha, the parsha that we read in the synagogue on Simchat Torah. Haazinu is the song of Jewish history throughout the ages. It has high notes and low notes to it. It portrays the agony of our exile and the steadfastness of both God and Israel in keeping the covenant between them under all circumstances. What makes the song so meaningful is that the rabbis of the Midrash interpreted it in a double sense - as referring to Israel but at the same time also referring to the nations of the world, even to our oppressors. A lesson of importance is thus communicated to us. Israel does not live in a vacuum. The reaction of the nations of the world to us can influence our future and our path in history. And the corollary to this is that the nations of the world are judged in the scale of God's history of mankind. Their relationship to the Jewish people, its faith and values and life-style, is really a measure of their own qualities and goals. So many nations and empires have passed from the scene over our long history and they all were measured and judged by their relationship to Israel and its faith. Thus the song of Haazinu is a universal song, not meant only for Jewish ears and hearts but it is rather a song to be heard and appreciated by all humans.

This is in line with the dual quality of our prayer service on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. On one hand the prayers are purely Jewish in nature and goals, exclusive to the chosenness of the people of Israel. Yet, on the other hand, there is a strong message of universalism that pervades all of the High Holy Days' prayers. Judaism combines within it an exclusivity and a universalism at one and the same time. It is unique among all faiths to do so. Judaism sees the Jewish people as the experiment that will prove the entire theory of mankind and civilization to be possible and correct. In order for the experiment to work correctly it requires a certain exclusivity, a sterile laboratory if you will, uncontaminated by outside sources and influences. Yet the purpose of this experiment is to prove that all mankind is able to serve God and man and that human civilization can achieve a better world in spite of all setbacks and heartaches. Haazinu, which beckons to us all to listen to a song that often has discordant notes within it, nevertheless can and will lead to Vzot Habracha, blessings and hope and true achievements. The Torah assured us that this song of Haazinu/Vzot Habracha would never be forgotten by the Jewish people. It defines our nationhood and casts our eternity. It is timely and relevant under all circumstances and in all generations. Remembering the song is alone an act of teshuva - return to God and to our true inner soul and self.

Shana tova.
Rabbi Berel Wein

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