

THE GREAT SONG

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The great song of Moshe and of Israel forms the centerpiece of this week's parsha. The song was not a one-off historical event. It has remained a part of the morning services of the synagogue prayers of Jews for millennia.

The song concentrates on God's power, on Israel's always miraculous survival and on the perfidious behavior of the wicked enemies of the Jewish people. God's power and greatness is seen in the salvation of Israel from its enemies, strong as they may be or have been. This song of Moshe forms one of the bookends of the story of the Jewish people.

The other bookend is the second song of Moshe - this time Moshe alone is the performer - in the parsha of Haazinu at the conclusion of the Book of Dvarim. That song also reiterates the theme of this earlier song relating to God's power and omnipotence, the survival of the Jewish people against all odds, and the judgments to be rendered against the enemies of the Jewish people.

So the Torah at the beginning of the narrative of Israel's sojourn in the Sinai desert and at the end of that forty year period sings the same song, albeit with different words and melody. But the content and message of the song has remained the same. This can also be said regarding all of Jewish history - it is the same song that has sustained us for these many generations though the words and melody may no longer be exactly the same throughout this long period of time and through our varied experiences.

Moshe instructs the Jewish people to learn and always remember the song of Haazinu. It is the song of the future redemption of Israel, the song that will light the way for Jews in dark and dangerous times. So why is it that the song that Jews know best, the one that we recite seven times every week of our lives is the first song of Moshe and Israel at the salvation of God at Yam Suf?

The lesson here is obvious though often overlooked. The second song of Moshe has little credence if not for the first song at the Yam Suf. Once having experienced miraculous redemption, it is possible to believe firmly that it will happen once more. We are taught in the Torah that in the future redemption "you will be shown wondrous events just as it was in the days of the Exodus from Egypt." That is why the commandments of the Torah, the Shabat itself and all the holidays are classified and named as being a memory aid to the Exodus from Egypt.

Those who cannot remember the past rarely have lasting hope for their future. The song of Moshe and Israel at the Yam Suf validates all later Jewish experiences, goals and hopes. It is a constant reminder of God's omnipotence and of His guarantee to us of Jewish survival and ultimate triumph over evil and wickedness. This Shabat is one of "shira" - song - because, again, it validates and confirms all Jewish songs throughout the ages.

The Psalmist teaches us that at the time of the final redemption "then our tongues will be filled with song." The melody and words may be new to us then but the message will certainly be grounded in the teachings of Moshe and Israel in the song of this week's parsha.

Shabat shalom, Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com