

Parashat Ha'Azinu

The last four chapters of Deuteronomy are really an appendix to the whole of the Torah. In preparation for the final step which is to take Israel across Jordan to claim its inheritance, Moses hands over his authority to Joshua, knowing full well that the overall future choice of Israel will be disobedience and not loyal service to Adonai, and that they will generally prefer evil to good and suffer death before they reach true life. Accordingly, in the so-called "Song of Moses" and the "Blessing of Moses", the truth about Israel (Israel meaning the "upright one.") is summed up - wilful, ungrateful, faithless, and deserving and receiving the just punishment for their disobedience. Yet they will still be the people of God's choice, blessed beyond their deserts, forgiven by His love; with the eternal God as their refuge and underneath them His ever-loving arms. Thus, the warnings of the Song conclude with the promise of a final redemption in the future. With this magnificent picture of the people of God as they have always been, Deuteronomy nears its completion, with the death of Moses.

The bulk of this week's portion in Chapter 32, is of this second poetic song given by Moses. To re-iterate, it is a prophecy of what will happen to the Jews - the good and the bad - until the end times. Recall that we came across Moses's first song, the Song of the Sea, at the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. In both his poem-songs, Moses becomes prophet and poet and not just the great teacher, law-giver and judge. Today's portion is concluded with God commanding Moses to climb Mount Nebo, to view the Promised Land before his passing. What of the song in this portion?

You will all remember that Genesis 1:1-2 opens as, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was unformed and void, darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water." Moses' present Song opens with a call to that heaven and earth to hear its words of testimony, 'Hear, oh heavens as I speak! Listen, earth, to the words from my mouth!' As at the outset of God's Creation, God's heaven and earth have to bear witness because they exist, as Creation, in the past, present and the future - as will the Israelites and all future faithful, as they live beneath God's heaven and on His earth. God's divine plan is one of Creation to a final Completion.

Moses' Song continues with, 'May my teaching fall like rain. May my speech condense like dew, like rain on blades of grass, or showers on growing plants.' Rashi, the great medieval commentator, saw these gentle words as a description of the Torah as the essence or source of life. As this summer's fierce drought showed, both flora and fauna need refreshing rain. In like manner, we need the feeding of God's Word if we are to sustain a meaningful life, with a proper perspective on all the temptations of comfortable life-styles based purely on money and technology. Total surrender to such materialism brings a death and not a life.

Our song continues in verses 3 & 4, "For I will proclaim the name of Adonai. Come, declare the greatness of our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just. A trustworthy God who does no wrong, He is righteous and straight." The ultimate message of

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the Song is not so much the twists and turns of the Israelites but of the God of Israel's constant, unchanging, immovable presence. He is the Rock! He is the past, present and future. He is the Creation, the Revelation, and the Completion. Verse 15 has it, "Yeshurun abandoned God His Maker; he scorned the Rock, his salvation", and verse 18 has, "You ignore the Rock that fathered you, you forgot God, who gave you birth." With the old Midrash scholars, we recall that in Exodus 17, Moses struck a rock and life-giving water gushed out. It supplied the Israelites needs every day. The Midrash says that the rock that gave daily, life-giving water to the Israelites, followed them throughout their wanderings. Paul was well aware of this when, in 1 Cor.10:4, he wrote. "(Our fathers) all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Messiah." Now, here is the great mystery of life. Yeshua is the Rock, the eternal unchanging One, and He is present today in all who are truly faithful and sincere, in their belief and actions.

Verses 10-11 are also very revealing, 'He found his people in desert country, in the waste of the howling desert. He protected him, and cared for him, guarded him like the apple of His eye. Like an eagle who stirs up her nest, hovers over her young, takes them, and carries them as she flies.' Apparently, two Hebrew words appear only in these verses and in the previously remarked Genesis 1:2 - in all the Torah. One is *tohu*, translated as 'waste'. Genesis 1:2 opens, "And the earth was *tohu vavohu* - "wild (chaotic) and waste". Out of this primitive state, God created Eden, a beautiful heaven and earth. Also, is implied, God's wonderful grace in taking His people from Egyptian bondage and guiding them through desert wilderness, to His revelation of Torah at Mount Sinai.

Our second Hebrew word is *yirachef* - "hovers". Thus, the Song says that the eagle "hovers over her young (her fledglings)". Apparently, the same verb comes in a slightly different form in Genesis 1:2: "The spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water." This Spirit is the creative Spirit of God. That Spirit hovered over those waters, to give life to the new Creation. In like manner, Moses is saying that God's Spirit, revealed in fire and glory-cloud is and will give guidance and life to the Israelites, in their travels. That Spirit is also present in the Tabernacle. Israel, the Song says, is an essential stage in God's Divine Plan.

Paul, as so often, puts it succinctly in 1 Cor.12:13, "For it was by one Spirit that we were all immersed in one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." In this context, let us remind ourselves of this morning's Brit Hadashah - in 2 Cor.6:16, where Paul writes, "For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." God is the Saving Eagle, the Father, the Nurturer, the Creator, who saved the fledgling Israelite eaglets in a desert wasteland, just as He saves us to day, be we imperfect, naive and wilful, and in dire need of Holy Spirit's guidance from within us.

Moses had found Israel enslaved and now she was free, with Adonai as God and the Torah as her guide. The Moses of the Torah foresaw the Messiah of the Psalmist, the Servant of

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Isaiah, the Son of Man of Daniel, the wisdom of Proverbs, and, as we have observed in today's message, the Creative Word of Genesis. The Brit Hadashah sees Yeshua as the new Moses who leads His people in a new and greater Exodus, out of the bondage of sin into the freedom of the Spirit and to the foretaste of the Promised Land. Like Moses, He gives them a new Law, but one which is completed in the Sermon on the Mount; like Moses on Sinai he reflects the divine glory at the Transfiguration; like Moses He establishes a New Covenant in the words of His last Passover Seder. Finally, as the author of Hebrews rightly points out, Yeshua could not merely be a new Moses, since Moses was but a servant of God whereas Yeshua was the Son. However, as the whole of Scripture testifies, in the long story of Creation to Completion, there was no more faithful or gifted servant in Israel, than Moses.