

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

SHIRA

I don't know why, but quite a few years ago (maybe even 25?) I heard about Perek Shira. Not only did I hear about it and subsequently start saying it daily, but I found out that many people were doing the same. This "obscure" piece of work is actually found in the back of many siddurim and I had never noticed. I don't remember where I read it, but I was informed that as the time for ge'ula approached, people would be saying Perek Shira. I can't prove this, I just remembered thinking to myself that since so many people are now saying it, the time for ge'ula must be near.

Perek Shira contains verses from the Tanach that are "said" by 85 different creations: animate and inanimate. The authorship of this work is debated. It is at least 1000 years old, but exactly when, and who wrote it, isn't agreed upon. Some suggest that it was written by Dovid HaMelech, others that it was his son Shlomo, some say both wrote it together. There is also an opinion that it was written by Rav Yehuda HaNasi. Regardless, what is the purpose of this work? "At a simple level, it is a key to understanding the universe as a guide to life" (R. Nosson Slifkin,

Nature's Song, p.39). The verses that are attributed to the different components of the universe, teach a lesson which we are to learn and put into action.

Since there is no rhyme or rhythm to be found within these verses, why is it referred to as a "song"? We could ask the same question about Parshat Ha'azinu. That parsha is clearly not a song by any stretch of the imagination. It contains the future trials and troubles of Israel. And yet, it is called a song: HASHIRA HAZOT (D'varim 31:30, Parshat Vayeilech). Apparently, the message of the "song" of Ha'azinu and that of Perek Shira is the same.

The Maharal explains that true SHIRA is attained when we fulfill Gd's will. And in so doing, our actions are demonstrating that we are aware of Gd's involvement in every aspect of our lives and in the running of the world and therefore have complete faith in Him. For why else would we choose to fulfill Gd's will? This realization occurred in the clearest way at Yam Suf. There, the people reached their highest level of faith in and awe of Gd. The plagues preceding this event didn't have the same effect, as evidenced by the large number of Jews who did not want to leave Egypt despite all they had been witnessing. And, indeed, this was the first SHIRA recorded in the Tanach.

Maybe that is why it is referred to as SHIRA CHADASHA... [with a new song the redeemed ones praised Your name at the seashore.]

Similarly, the concept of SHIRA as it relates to Ha'azinu is that after all is said and done, the Jews now understood and clearly saw that all the future events, all future history, was under Gd's control.

Why did I suddenly become reminded of PEREK SHIRA? Because, as usual, I finally paid more attention to the words I was saying while davening and something struck me for the first time in BARUCH SHE'AMAR. We say UVSHIREI DAVID... with the songs of Your servant Dovid, we will praise you... This is certainly an appropriate introduction to P'sukei d'Zimra since most of what we will be saying is from the words of T'hillim, written by David HaMelech. But I saw a possible additional meaning, a deeper one in these words. If I choose to understand SHIR here as the Maharal defines it, then this is not merely referring to the words, the 'songs' composed by Dovid. The SHIR represents the acts, his - David's - behavior, the deeds that fulfilled the will of Gd. The creatures in PEREK SHIRA create SHIRA by carrying out their assigned tasks and this obedience to Gd is His praise, a song. When we truly recognize Gd and perform His service, this elevates creation and thus, indeed, we create

a song to Him. If we act in the way David acted (SHIREI DAVID), accepting and fulfilling Gd's will in all circumstances; if we can commune with Gd, as David did, through our behavior, we sing our song and so create praise for HaShem. UVSHIREI DAVID... N'HALELCHA - if we behave as David did, we will create praise for HaShem.

Do we not say ASHIRAH LASHEM B'CHAYAI (T'hillim 104) - I will sing to HaShem as long as I live? Why should I not "... create song for HaShem by fulfilling His will and show my complete faith in Him; B'CHAYAI - through the way I live my life? It sounds like a reasonable meaning to me.

If this is a valid interpretation of the concept of shira in this context, it helps me understand why so much of P'sukei d'Zimra talks about how the angels "sing" and praise Gd. We know this is not because Gd "needs" it. He doesn't. But the singing they do simply means they have fulfilled the task that Gd set before them, thus creating praise for Him.

SHIRU LASHEM SHIR CHADASH - sing a new song to HaShem (T'hillim 149) - may we be zocheh to do so. *