

Parashat Ha'azinu 5782, 2021

*Tzur Yisrael*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, Chana bat Sarah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The majority of our *parasha* is comprised of an intricate and richly metaphoric *shirah* (song). As in other such poetic passages in *Tanach*, the exegetes of our *masorah* analyze its constitutive elements in multiple ways. A sterling example of this is the word, “*tzur*,” that appears in the verse: “The deeds of *HaTzur* are perfect, for all His ways are just. He is a faithful G-d, never unfair; righteous and moral is He.” (*Sefer Devarim* 32:4, translation, *The Living Torah*, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan *zatzal*) The Ibn Ezra (c. 1090-c.1165) suggests that *tzur* is utilized in our *pasuk* to convey Hashem’s eternal existence, in that, “He exists forever like a rock.” The Rambam (1135-1204) maintains, as well, that *tzur* denotes the idea of “the Rock” in the sense that He is the causal agent for all that exists: “G-d, may He be exalted, is designated as the Rock, as He is the principle and the efficient cause of all things other than Himself. Accordingly, it is said: ‘The Rock, His work is perfect.’” (*The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines, vol. I:16, page 42)

These explanations work well within the basic etymological structure of *tzur*. Perhaps one of the most novel interpretations of *HaTzur*, however, was offered by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Torah scholar and student of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, Rabbi Ya’akov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865).

In his Torah commentary, *Haketav v'HaKabbalah*, he asserts that the appellation, “*HaTzur*,” derives from the word, “*tzarirah*,” which connotes the idea of a bundle. Consequently, he translates our term as “He Who combines together.” In addition, Rav Mecklenburg opines that Hashem received this name based upon two facets of His actions that are implicitly found in *Ma'aseh Bereishit*:

The first feature of this name is that He conjoins and combines the specific aspects of all creatures, in such a manner that they will be united and linked together, one to another, to the point that they are unified into one complete entity that exists in total perfection. From this perspective, we may view “*HaTzur*” as a verb...The second feature of this name is that it is a *shame hata'are* — a descriptive noun, in the sense that everything extant is combined and associated with Him, may He be blessed, as He is the origin and the basis for everything ...It is with this intention that He, may He be blessed, is described as the *Tzur Olamim* (He Who conjoins all Creation, *Sefer Yeshayahu* XXVI:4, translations my own).

In Rav Mecklenburg's view, *HaTzur* signifies two crucial concepts regarding the manner in which Hashem relates to our world: Hashem is He Who unifies all life “into one complete entity that exists in total perfection.” Moreover, everything that exists “is combined and associated with Him, as He is the origin and the basis for everything.” In sum, the Almighty emerges as the bedrock of our being. Little wonder, then, that Chana the prophetess, who had been unable to conceive until she miraculously gave birth to her son Shmuel, declared in her *shirah* so long ago: “There is none as holy as the L-rd, for there is none besides You; And there is no *Tzur* like our G-d.” (*Sefer Shmuel* I:2:2, translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

We are fortunate, indeed, that the *Anshei Keneset HaGadolah* (Men of the Great Assembly, circa 500 BCE) sensitized us, as well, to the immanence of *HaTzur* in our lives, through the formulation of two phrases in our daily *tefilah*:

*Tzur Yisrael*, arise to the aid of Israel and liberate, as you pledged, Judah and Israel. (From the introduction to the *Shemoneh Esrai*)

We gratefully thank You, for it is You Who are Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers for all eternity; *Tzur* of our lives, Shield of salvation are You... (From the introduction to the *Modim* section of the *Shemoneh Esrai*, translations, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*)

May *Tzur Yisrael* ever protect us, and may we recognize His omnipresence in our lives.

*V'chane yihi ratzon.*

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The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav zatzal](#)