

So now, write this song for yourselves. (31:19)

Hashem commanded Moshe *Rabbeinu* to write the Torah and teach it to the nation. The Torah is referred to here as a *shirah*, song. (Alternatively, *shirah* applies to *Shiras Haazinu*.) Writing the Torah is the last (613th) *mitzvah*, for the climax of all the *mitzvos* is their redaction followed by teaching and studying. This comes across as enigmatic. We would think that writing the Torah should be the first *mitzvah*. It is almost as if a child goes to school, studies all year, and, at the end of the year, receives a textbook. Should it not be the other way around – with the book being given out on the first day of school and then studied throughout the year?

What is a *shirah*, and how is it different from a written narrative? A *shirah* is a harmonious arrangement of distinct tones and rhythms, some high, some low, with major and minor keys coalescing together in harmony. In other words, a song does not necessarily follow a specific order. As a harmony, it must balance highs and lows, majors and minors – wherever they may be. The order of the song is reflected at the end, when it all comes together. A narrative usually follows a straight, historical timeline of events.

A song is filled with emotion; its score resonates. A book is dry, a record of laws, events, stories of human success and failure, which does little to present a connection between them, since it sticks to the time line. A song connects the dots, because it must provide balance. When we read the Torah as a book, it is a superficial record. When we read it as a song – we sing it, as its every word resonates in our *neshamah*. We delve into the *penimius*, inner message of the song. Melodies have highs and lows which, on the surface, may contradict, but ultimately blend in harmony. We seek depth when we sing; we feel emotion; we understand what appears to be “dry” as being part of a Divine symphony. The Torah is not a book of instruction. It is a living, breathing, resonating song filled with deep emotion and profound messages. When we “sing” it daily, we come alive.

Yes, the mitzvah to write a Torah scroll could have been the first mitzvah – like a textbook to be given out the first day of school, but then, it would not be a shirah. We would read – not sing or study – not absorb. It would not be our life. After reading the entire Torah with its paradoxes and historical moments that raise questions, we are told that this is not ordinary book. It is a shirah. Now it all comes together – in harmony.