[Listen](#)

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Ha'azinu, this week's Torah, literally means "Listen"! Or as they used to say "Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Or Oyez! Oyez! But hearing is not enough. Words, sounds are vehicles for actions. So *Ha'azinu* also means pay attention. Realize. Connect. As indeed does the parallel word Shema. Hebrew poetry is full of parallelisms, saying something and then repeating it in other words.

In Hebrew, the words for song and poem are the same, which makes a lot of sense. Song always played an important part in transmitting ideas. In early societies, without books or documents, people gathered around the camp-fires or in the villages to communicate and would sing songs of ancient heroes, victories and traditions. As societies grew more complex and advances in communication were invented we have progressed to books, newspapers and now the internet. But the basic goal and experience of transmitting culture and religion remain the same.

On the face of it, Ha'azinu is one of several chapters in the Torah that are avowedly not prose. But it repeats in poetry the themes of rejection, abandonment and final reconciliation that Moses has said up to now in his speeches. The implication is that there is a difference in language in the Torah between history, law and on the other hand poetry. Yet in several places, the text of the Torah refers to all the Torah as a song. I find this one of the most important ideas in our tradition. The beauty of poetry is that it can be understood on many levels and that it appeals to emotion and sensitivity.

Most of the poems of the Torah are written differently to the main script. In this case, unlike the Song of the Sea, there are two vertical columns. It is almost as though there two forces, positive and negative, God versus the Israelites.

That's precisely what I love about Torah. It may include so many different strands of texts and interpretations, even paradoxes and contradictions. It includes laws of course. But it appeals on an emotional level. It resonates with my soul in a way no other text I have encountered does.