

I like to think of myself as someone who does not complain a lot. Some of you may have a different view and we can certainly discuss that at Kiddush, preferably after I've had a schnapps. But today, even though it is Shabbat Shuva, the Sabbath of returning and repentance, I am going to complain. This is one difficult torah reading. Although I have done many readings throughout the years, Ha'Azinu was for me by far the hardest. The difficulty comes from the language – it's not narrative, law or descriptive text. It's poetry and the poem is called the "Song of Moses". For those who like gematria we can even find Moses signature here but that's a story for another Shabbat. What's more, with the exception of a few words and phrases it doesn't rhyme. It's what we call in English blank verse. In addition, the language is very unusual. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands but I know some of you remember the Simon and Garfunkel lyric: I've been slandered, libeled; I've heard words I never heard in the Bible. If you want words you never heard in the bible, you've come to the right place today. There are some words here that don't occur anywhere else and a few that only occur in one or two other places. All in all beautiful but unusual.

From all of these words, I'd like to pick out one to speak about but first I need to give you today's torah reading trivia fact. This is the last Shabbat parsha reading. Today is 26 September and the next time you'll hear a weekly sidra it will be 17 October and that will be Bereshit. So in one way, we have come to the end of the torah reading cycle. We're also almost to the end of Sefer D'varim which is a book unto itself and in some ways different than the other four books that precede it. So if we go back 9 weeks ago, we'll find ourselves in the first parsha and in Chapter 1, verse 12 we'll find the word Aicha. Chanted to the melody of the eponymous book, this reading is always on the Shabbat which immediately precedes Tisha B'Av. As we start Lamentations, the first word is the name of the book, Aicha. And now that we are at the end of the cycle, the word Aicah appears again. This time it's in verse 30 and the trop sign is a gershayim which is one of those trop that causes the word to stand on its own rather than be joined to another word or phrase and it's the only one in the poetry section of the parsha. Aicha is usually translated as "How". I think it appears here to remind us of the beginning of the book and to ask us –Aicha – how did you feel 9 weeks ago after the three haftarot of rebuke and before Tisha B'Av.

Aicha – how did you react since then as the 7 haftarot of consolation reminded us of the approach of the introspection of the month of Elul.

Aicha – how are you preparing yourself now in the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur on this Shabbat Shuva as we think about returning and repentance? To me, it is significant that the word Aicha appears in this week's reading which more often than not falls on this Shabbat.

Whether it is all of the words or just a single word, as we start the New Year and look forward to renewing the torah reading cycle I hope that each of us will find meaning in our weekly torah readings.

And now I give you this week's parsha – Ha'Azinu.