

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
Haazinu 5769

*Mazel Tov to Alissa and Daniel Chambre on the birth of a daughter.
Mazel to the proud grandparents Sima and Herman Hertzberg.*

Weekly Parsha :: HAAZINU :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Moshe calls upon heaven and earth to be the witnesses necessary to verify the existence of the eternal covenant between God and Israel. Though there is a certain amount of logic in using the heavens and the earth as the buttresses to the eternal covenant, for after all they are also timeless relative to human life, they are mute witnesses. How do they testify to the covenant and relationship between God and Israel?

What is the message that lies in this call of Moshe to heaven and earth? The Torah after all does not engage in needless hyperbole. I sense that the Torah comes to point out to us the unnatural state of existence of the Jewish people throughout the centuries.

Just as there is a visible order and food chain in nature so too does there appear to be such an order in human history and its processes of civilization. Even the strongest and largest empires and superpowers eventually weaken and disappear from the stage of human events.

There is apparently a food chain that applies to nations and ideologies as well. The heavens and their galaxies, stars, planets and suns operate with an unchanging exactitude that influences human lives here on our small planet.

The earth revolves on its axis in an exactitude that preserves it from the fire of the sun and the frost of space. The opinion of Rambam is that the laws of nature are eternal and immutable.

The so-called miracles that occur within nature are built into nature itself and are not to be seen as violations of the laws of nature themselves. The heavens and earth are governed by laws that never change and this type of inexorable law also applies to human history and events.

To all of this idea that there is nothing exceptional in nature and in human events there is one great exception – that of the story of the Jewish people over all of its millennia of existence.

The continuing wonder of Jewish existence and resilience in the face of impossible conditions and brutal enemies, of internal weaknesses and divisions, and external foes who proclaim their intent to destroy the Jewish people and state, is the greatest proof of the eternal existence of the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman in his debate with the Church and Jewish apostates in 1263 Barcelona stated that the greatest proof of the uniqueness of the Jewish people is its survival against all odds. How much more would he insist on the correctness of this argument today, almost eight centuries later.

It is the very regularity of heaven and earth and all of nature that they govern that serves as the counterpoint for the inexplicable and unnatural existence and creativity in world history and affairs.

The Jews are the exceptional unique people in the world and their exceptional existence is based completely upon God's covenant with them. Thus the heavens and the earth are the correct and natural witnesses to the supernatural existence and triumph of Israel over the long centuries. Moshe's witnesses and covenant remain firm until today.

Shabat shalom.

Chag sameac

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YOM KIPPUR :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The "one day in the year" has arrived and is upon us. The day to "afflict our souls" and pause and contemplate our humanity and mortality is the day of Yom Kippur. Afflicting our souls applies not just to the fasting and other deprivations of normal comforts that the Torah prescribes for us on this holiest of days. The true affliction of our souls occurs in our own self contemplation, in our thoughts, regrets and hopes.

People very rarely have an opportunity to talk to themselves. In fact people that do so on a regular basis are thought to be disturbed. A wag once remarked that he enjoyed talking to himself since it was probably the most intelligent conversation that he would have all day. Jewish tradition is replete with great men of saintly character, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev and the Chafetz Chayim, two of many for example, who would discuss the day's events and their behavior that day with themselves before retiring for the night.

If such behavior is beyond the usual norm for most of us, at least on Yom Kippur we can afford the luxury of such a conversation. More than that, the holiness of the day demands of us that we conduct such a conversation with our souls and selves. Because we are not in the habit of creating such conversations on a regular basis, we oftentimes find such a conversation to be painful, awkward, troubling and difficult. No wonder the Torah calls it a method of "afflicting one's soul."

The main topics of the conversation are to determine what we really want out of life and what we are willing to demand of ourselves to achieve our goals. The current worldwide economic crisis, bringing with it so many lost jobs, shrunken assets and portfolios, has perhaps concentrated our minds wonderfully to attempt to answer these existential questions.

Many of the certainties in our lives that were rock hard just a few short months ago now wobble in the winds that suddenly buffet us. A good friend of mine made a certain commitment to a very worthwhile Torah educational institution last year. He delayed payment of his pledge because he wished to pay it to the institution in shares of stock that he was holding. He wanted to wait till the stock traded at a certain high price before transferring the stock to the institution. As the stock approached that high trading price the institution pressed him to pay the pledge even if the stock was still a point or two below his target goal.

His business acumen betrayed him and he was determined to hold on till the last possible dollar could be wrung out from the transaction. The stock since then has declined by seventy percent. He moaned to me that he not only lost the money but he is now unable to redeem his pledge and attain the reward of the mitzvah potentially involved. I think that the problem was that he never had that conversation with himself three months ago. Had he done so, things might have turned out differently for him.

Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzatto in his immortal work, Mesilat Yesharim, begins the book with the question "What is the obligation and purpose of a person in his life in this world?" This deceptively appearing simple question begs no easy answer. In Jewish tradition, the general answer has always been service to God and to man, to Jewish tradition and continuity, and to creating a personal and national sense of holiness and morality.

The details to this answer lie in observance of Torah commandments and in a sense of spiritual soulfulness in our everyday mundane activities. But the answer only comes alive and becomes meaningful to us if we are able to internalize its message and make it a part of our being and personality. A great mentor of mine would always comment regarding certain situations and problematic decisions that one should always ask one's self "What does God think about this matter?" Having the conversation with one's self before acting or implementing one's thoughts many times avoids having to have the conversation with others when it will be more embarrassing and painful to do so.

Yom Kippur allows us to ask ourselves "What does God think of me, my behavior, my goals and my relations with others?" Yom Kippur strips us of all pretenses and slick answers. It forces us to look at ourselves honestly, deeply into our personality, and to the very recesses of our soul. That is why Yom Kippur is in reality "the one and only day of the year."

Gmar chatima tova.

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
PARSHAS HAAZINU

Who I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d. (32:3)

According to the Rashbam, this pasuk teaches us the importance of accepting and affirming Hashem's deeds, regardless of how they might superficially appear to us. Moshe Rabbeinu is saying, "When I speak of Hashem's great deeds and His kindness towards you, and also when I speak of the necessary punishments He must mete out against you, attribute to Him greatness. Acknowledge that Hashem's ways are just, and always in accordance with what you deserve." Chazal derive a number of halachos from this pasuk concerning brachos, blessings, and the listener's response to them. When Hashem's Name was uttered in the Bais Hamikdash, those assembled were to respond: Baruch Shem kovod malchuso l'olam vaed, "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity."

The Sifri derives from here that when one makes a blessing, the listener should respond Amen, an affirmation of the blessing. In the Talmud 119b Chazal say that Amen is an acronym for Keil Melech Ne'eman, "G-d Faithful King." Indeed, Chazal extol the one who responds to the blessing made by another Jew. The commentators expound upon the awesome reward in store for he who says Amen properly; likewise, they decry and detail the punishment for he who neglects to respond Amen in a proper, dignified manner.

When we answer Amen, we indicate our agreement with the blessing or with what the individual is expressing. Amen means that our inner understanding, our intrinsic perception, is at one with that which we have heard. It is much more than a one-word public response; it is a reflection of the inner emotions of our soul. It is the essential "me" confirming that the sentiments which we have heard, resonate with our own thoughts and feelings. The purpose of a "loud" Amen is to rally others, to use our faculty of speech as a public declaration of our inner reverberation of thought and agreement with the blessing. The loud Amen is not for us; it is for others. For us, it represents a quiet reflection, a deep emotional expression exalting in G-d's Name, an inner recognition that Eil Melech Ne'eman.

So many stories abound which demonstrate the significance of answering Amen. My goal was to find one inspiring story that would make a difference, so that I might encourage people to wait in shul until after the last Kaddish has been recited. After all, just imagine how that last Kaddish, the Kaddish Yasom, prayer of an orphan, must "feel" when we look for reasons to conclude our session in shul early, ignoring the last Kaddish. It is almost as if it should be called the "orphaned" Kaddish, since it is often left alone in shul with a steadily decreasing minyan.

Having said that, the following is a true story that took place recently in Ashdod. There was a family in the community who had recently lost its mother. In her merit, members of the family took upon themselves to recite the blessing over food only in the presence of others, so that the others could answer Amen. It seemed simple enough. One day, however, the daughter came home and was extremely thirsty. It was a hot day, and she had walked home from school. All of this added up to a parched throat and a powerful thirst. Since no one was at home to respond to her blessing, she remained thirsty. She waited and waited. Finally, two and a half hours later, one of her siblings arrived, so that she could finally have her drink.

That night, she had a dream. Her deceased mother appeared to her and said, "Know, my child, the fact that you waited so long to make a brachah so that someone could answer Amen, made a powerful impression in Heaven. Indeed, as a reward for your deed, it was decided that a positive decree would be granted. It so happens that one of your classmates is gravely ill with an incurable disease. In the merit of your good deed, she will be healed completely." Her mother told her the name of the classmate, which shocked her, since no one knew that she had been ill.

At 5 a.m. the girl woke up in shock. She immediately ran to her father and told him the dream. The father said that he would look into the matter in the morning, since no one was aware of her classmate's illness. Shortly after davening, her father approached the father of her classmate and inquired about his and his family's health. The man answered that everyone was well, but wondered about the sudden interest in his family's welfare. The widowed father revealed to him the reason for his question.

The man was shocked. No one was aware of his daughter's illness. It was supposed to be kept a secret. The widowed father's explanation must be true, because they had not told anyone about their daughter's illness. Both fathers were members of the same Chassidic sect, so they went to their Rebbe to seek his advice. The Rebbe listened to the story and then instructed the father to take the ill girl to the doctor for a physical, to determine the extent of her illness. On that same day, the girl had been scheduled to begin her first therapy session.

The family are believers, and, thus, they were not shocked when the doctor came out and incredulously declared the girl healthy. The results of the exam were astounding. The child was totally clear - not one bad cell. There was absolutely no trace of her illness! It had to be a miracle. It was a miracle; the result of a little girl's stubbornly observing a mitzvah that can have a life-impacting merit.

The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. (32:4)

It is with these words that Moshe Rabbeinu's Shirah, song, actually begins. Tzur, the rock, is a metaphorical description of the Almighty, which occurs several times in the Shirah. Its presence in the Shirah indicates that it is a characterization of Hashem. Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, comments that with regard to Klal Yisrael and its relationship to Hashem, Tzur implies a dual entity. We know that Hashem has been the everlasting support of our existence throughout history. We exist only as a result of His will. With this in mind, we are assured that as a nation we are indestructible. On the other hand, we must live our lives based on the specific paths revealed to us in the Torah. These are laws which we may not ignore, because they are as immutable as the existence and the Will of G-d Himself. Whatever turns of fate may be in store for us, we experience them to serve one purpose: to bring about the ultimate realization of Hashem's objectives for, and through, Klal Yisrael. In other words, Hashem has a plan, and we are part of it. The blows that we receive at times are the hammer blows of G-d's shaping power, fashioning and molding the Jewish people.

We exist as a result of His Will, and our existence is contingent upon our conformance with His Laws. As invincible as a rock, we, as a people, are here to stay. Yet, we have "issues." We seek an understanding of the "hammer blows" which have become an intrinsic part of the collective life of our nation. We believe that Hashem will never abandon us, yet, we are bothered by His concealment. We feel alone, but we know deep down that we are not. How do we relate to such a predicament? Perhaps the following story will lend some insight.

There was once a man who suffered greatly, constantly being stricken with illness and troubles. Whenever he was struck by misfortune, which was often, he would feel alone and forsaken. He would cry out to Hashem and ask: Keili, Keili, lamah azavtani, "My G-d, My G-d, why have You abandoned me?"

One night, he dreamed that he was walking on a very long path. When he looked back, he saw two sets of footprints, but in some places, where the path narrowed, he saw only one set of prints. He began to think. After a while, he came to the realization that the path in question was really the path of his own life. Starting with birth, he passed through childhood, developed into adulthood and now he was at the sunset of his life. He had reached old age, and the path was reaching its end.

He traveled on this path in the accompaniment of Hashem. The path was wide and well lit. Hence, the second set of footprints. During those instances in which the path became narrow and dim, there was only one set of footprints. Hashem had left him in bad times. Why? Why did You forsake me in the times of travail? I needed You there. You allowed me to travel all alone during times that I needed You most. Why?

Suddenly, he heard a gentle voice, "My beloved son. You are mistaken. Yes, during those times of difficulty, when travail and bitterness seemed to engulf you, the road became quite narrow, and you seemed to be walking alone. This is not true. Actually, you are never alone. The reason you see only one set of prints is that when times are painful, when the path is constricted, I carry you. Those footprints are mine! You are never alone. Even at times when you feel abandoned - especially during those periods of hardship- I am even closer than before."

The man woke up from his dream a changed person. He realized how wrong he had been, how important it was to rely on faith to help him

shoulder his troubles. "Even when I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."

Hashem spoke (to Moshe) on that very day. (32:48)

The phrase "on that very day" appears three times in the Torah. In each circumstance, a large mass of people were determined to prevent Hashem from carrying out His decree. Thus, as an indication of the futility and folly of human endeavor, the pasuk in each case emphasizes that it took place "on that very day," in public view, during which anyone who foolishly thought that he could prevent the proceedings from occurring, could see how wrong he was. The first case is when Noach was about to enter the Ark, and his compatriots thought that they could prevent this from taking place. This was later followed by the Egyptians thinking they could impede the Jewish People from leaving Egypt. In this last scenario, the people were distraught concerning Moshe Rabbeinu's imminent death. They thought they could obviate this decree by not allowing him to ascend the mountain. Hashem ordered him to go up to the mountain, publicly, in plain sight, to demonstrate that man cannot countermand Hashem's Will.

What seems puzzling is the thought that might have entered the people's minds. Does a Jew for a minute believe that it is within his power to prevent someone's death? Horav Aizik Ausband, Shlita, cites his rebbe, Horav Asher Kalman Baron, zl, who explains that Klal Yisrael thought that they would intercede through prayer. Knowing fully well the awesome power of prayer, they would put it to good use praying for their rebbe and leader, Moshe, to live.

Apparently, Hashem did not grant them the ability to save Moshe through prayer. Why? Rav Asher Kalman explains that a cardinal rule in the principles of emunah, belief in the Almighty, is that one can achieve the supernatural via prayer. The power of sincere prayer is unparalleled. One condition must be met, however: the individual must rely solely on Hashem. If he thinks for one moment that his tefillah, prayer, has its own efficacy, he is not only wrong, but he borders on heresy! A person may - and should - entreat Heaven for mercy, asking for one more dose of compassion, one more chance, but he may never think that he has any power to rescind a decree.

This was Klal Yisrael's error, when they said, "If we sense what is occurring, we will prevent it from taking place." They felt that they had the power, even if only through the medium of prayer, to halt Moshe's death. Their error was in relying upon their own sense of power.

Ascend to this Mount of Abarim... and die on the mountain... and be gathered to your people, as your brother died on Mount Hor, and was gathered to his people. (32:49, 50)

The Meshech Chochmah observes that when the Torah relates Moshe Rabbeinu's imminent death in Sefer Bamidbar, it writes: "And you shall be gathered in to your people, you too, as your brother, Aharon, was gathered in" (Bamidbar 27:13). This is a truly impressive end to a life well-lived. The word death is not mentioned; the Torah merely says that, he is "gathered to his people." Indeed, Rashi writes that Moshe desired an end to his life that would parallel that of Aharon. In Sefer Devarim, as we note in the above pasuk, things seem to have changed. Moshe is offered the same "end" as Aharon; only this time the Torah writes concerning Aharon, "As your brother, Aharon, died on Mount Hor, and was gathered to his people." Now the word "death" with its inherent gloom and doom is mentioned. What happened between Bamidbar and Devarim?

Horav Meir Simcha, zl, sees the answer in Chazal's explanation of a similar change of wording elsewhere. In Melachim I 11:21, the Navi relates how "Hada heard in Egypt that David (Hamelech) had gone to rest with his fathers and that Yoav (ben Tzruyah), chief of his army, had died." David had gone to "rest" with his fathers, while Yoav had died. In the Talmud Bava Basra 116a, Chazal explain the contrast: "Concerning Yoav, who did not leave a son like himself after him, death is mentioned; concerning David, who did leave a son like himself, death is not mentioned." It depends on what one leaves over when he moves on. If continuity is suggested, his passing would not be expressed with such finality. If he is the end of his legacy, he has died.

In a sense, a parallel may be applied to Aharon HaKohen's departure from this world. Throughout the Torah, we note indications of Aharon's impressive stature. The Torah changes the phrase "Moshe and Aharon" to

"Aharon and Moshe" in order to indicate that they were of equal status. At one point, Aharon's son and heir, Elazar, stood on a plane similar in status to that of his father. In Bamidbar 27:21, the Torah writes, "Before Elazar HaKohen shall (Yehoshua) stand, and he shall ask him according to the judgment of the Urim before Hashem." Not every Kohen could be given a question for the Urim v'Tumim, only one who has spoken with Ruach HaKodesh, Divine Inspiration, and upon whom the Shechinah reposes. This all demonstrates that Elazar was destined to assume Aharon's position and status. Thus, in Sefer Bamidbar, no mention is made of "death" concerning Aharon's taking leave of this world. There was no "death." Like David Hamelech, he had left a son of his own considerable stature. Aharon was "gathered to his people," with no words connoting gloom used in this connection.

Something happened, however, to alter the circumstances and to create a change in Elazar's status. He was destined to be Yehoshua's primary counselor, to whom he would turn when he needed to hear Hashem's word through the Urim v'Tumim. After Aharon passed away, Elazar made a serious error which changed everything. At the time of the war with Midyan, although Aharon was gone and Elazar was now the Kohen Gadol, Moshe was still very much alive and in full capacity as the Rabbon Shel Yisrael, quintessential rebbe of the Jewish People. A question arose concerning the kashering and immersing of the captured utensils. Elazar decided to teach the laws to the soldiers.

Elazar was careful not to impugn Moshe's leadership and he certainly showed reverence to him. However, teaching the halachos at all when Moshe, his rebbe, was still alive was considered a breach in respect. Chazal in Eiruvim 63a, say: "Anyone who decides a halachic question in the presence of his teacher... is cast down from his greatness." Elazar did, and he was accordingly cast down. As Chazal tell us, although it is written that Yehoshua should consult the Urim v'Tumim through Elazar, it never occurred. Elazar lost the ability to consult with the Urim v'Tumim as a result of his infraction. Aharon no longer had a son on his own level of greatness to assume his exalted position in the world. Elazar was great, but he was not Aharon. He could not replace his father.

Following this misfortune, when Hashem referred to Aharon's departure from this world, He said to Moshe, "And be gathered to your people, as your brother, Aharon, died on Mount Hor." Now that Aharon no longer "left a son who was like himself," his demise became post-facto burdened with heavy-hearted connotations. No longer is his passing a triumphant "ingathering" to the previous generations. He had "died." The change of words reflects the downgrading of his status.

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, cites another instance in the Torah in which the opposite is true, when two people received an outstanding, everlasting reward for excelling in the area of respect for elders. We read in Parashas Vayechi about the scene in which Yaakov Avinu gave his final blessing to his children. Everyone received his personal blessing which addressed his individual character traits and qualities. Interestingly, Yosef's two sons, who were included among the tribes, received the consummate blessing, Becha yevorach Yisrael, yesimcha Elokim k'Ephraim v'k'Menashe. "Yisrael will bless (their children) by you thus: G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe" (Bereishis 48:20). This blessing begs elucidation. Why were these two grandchildren elevated to Shevatim, tribal status, and then given a blessing like no other tribe, whereby they become the standard for blessing for all future generations?

Yaakov was acutely aware that the generations would dwindle spiritually, each generation descending in its spiritual status from the generation that preceded it. When he saw Ephraim and Menashe, he saw a marked difference between them and the other tribes. As the third generation removed from him, they were able to elevate themselves to the level of his own children. He was impressed that not only did they not dwindle, but they actually ascended in their spiritual journey. What better blessing can a father give his sons than to be like these two archetypal leaders? Who does not want his son to rise to the level of previous generations?

How did they do it? What brought about this incredible elevation of spirit that characterized Ephraim and Menashe? Rav Bergman demonstrates how their self-effacing characters played a pivotal role in their relationships with their father and grandfather. Menashe is referred to as the

meturgamon, interpreter, between Yosef and his brothers. As his father's secretary, he was privy to be the first to detect the brothers' arrival in Egypt. He was the one who incarcerated Shimon; and, as supervisor over Yosef's palace, he was the one who welcomed the brothers to the home and later hid the silver goblet in Binyamin's sack. Last, he pursued them as thieves. Menashe played a central role in the reconciliation between the brothers and Yosef.

Likewise, we find Ephraim, who studied regularly with Yaakov, serving as the messenger to inform Yosef about his father's illness. Yosef's sons demonstrated extraordinary care, devotion and respect to their father and grandfather. They sought no accolades, a phenomenon which is indicated by the fact that the Torah does not mention them at all in its recording of events. Why? Precisely because of their consummate devotion. They viewed their devotion to the service they performed for their elders as a second nature. They were so selfless that when they engaged in it they saw themselves not as separate entities carrying out a service, but as extensions of those whom they served. The Torah thus records their death in the same impersonal manner.

The epitome of their humility came when they stood before Yaakov. Yosef placed them in a position such that Menashe, the older son, would receive the first blessing. Yaakov, however, did not seem to agree, indicating a preference to Ephraim over Menashe. Yosef respectfully "corrected" his father, who maintained his position. During this interchange, Ephraim and Menashe stood silently, not questioning, acquiescing to whatever decision was made, because they felt that it was not their place to interfere in a dialogue between their father and grandfather. This is respect! It concerned their future. Yet, they remained calm and did not mix in. This was self-effacement at its zenith, a sense of humility and respect that earned them unprecedented status as Shevatim, equal with their uncles!

When young people feel that they know better and are more "with it," have a better perception and understanding of the issues, they ultimately sever their relationship with the past and disrupt its continuity. We must remember that we, as each generation before us, serve as a link in Klal Yisrael's progression and perpetuity. When we connect with the past, our nation's history becomes alive. It no longer has happened to "them." It involves "us." We are "them," and they are "us." We are all part of the continuum of Klal Yisrael.

Malchuscha malchus kol olamim.

u'memshaltecha b'chol dor v'dor.

Your kingdom is a kingdom spanning all eternities. And your dominion is in every generation.

What difference is there between malchus, kingdom, and memshala, dominion? Furthermore, why is malchus a kingdom spanning all eternities, whereas memshalach is a dominion for all generations? The Siach Yitzchak cites the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, who says that malchus is b'ratzon, willingly, and memshalah, is a rulership even against one's will. This is the meaning of the pasuk in Tehillim 22:29, ki l'Hashem ha'meluchah u'mosheil ba'goyim, "For the sovereignty is Hashem's, and He rules over our Nations."

Concerning Klal Yisrael, it is a meluchah, which is accepted with good will. Hashem reigns over us b'ratzon. Regarding the other nations, it is similar to a mosheil, rulership with force. In the future, however, it will be V'hoysah l'Hashem ha'meluchah, v'haya Hashem l'melech al kol haaretz, "And the kingdom will be Hashem's. Then Hashem will be King over all the world" (Ovadiah 1:21) (Zechariah 14:9).

Everyone will then accept His rulership b'ratzon, willingly. This is what our pasuk is telling us, "Your kingdom (which is b'ratzon) is for all eternities, but Your domain, which You rule over the nations of the world, that is only for the coming generations until the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, when it will be accepted willingly by all peoples."

Last week's Torah reading ended with the phrase "Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it to the children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 31:19). One explanation for this wording is that it refers to this week's reading. According to Nahmanides, it instructs us to always recite Parashat Ha'azinu. However, the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin) infers another instruction altogether - that every Jew must write a Torah scroll: "Although our ancestors have bequeathed us Torah scrolls, we are commanded to write our own, as it is written, 'Now therefore write ye this song for you.'"

Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv of Volozhin) considers the entire Torah to be one long poem, as does Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. This idea of the Torah being poetry enables us to use the tools of literary criticism to reveal new perspectives in biblical study. For instance, in this week's reading, and nowhere else in the Pentateuch, tzur (rock) is used to mean God (in five different instances), obviously implying something about our relationship with him. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra comments: "The word tzur connotes that God stands firm as a rock, as it is written, '... but God is the strength of my heart' (Psalms 73:26) - that is, God is my everlasting support. However, there are those who consider tzur as referring to tzura (shape), as in '... and their beauty shall consume' (Psalms 49:14)."

Ibn Ezra's first suggestion does not seem to fit the mood of Parashat Ha'azinu, where tzur is continually juxtaposed with our sinful behavior - for example, "Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee" (Deut. 32:18), and, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect ... They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Deut. 32:4-5).

Ibn Ezra's second suggestion, according to which God is the supreme being that gives shape to all creatures and all things, has ancient roots. The Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Berakhot) describes a scene at the beit hamidrash (house of learning) in Lod in the early third century. Talmudic scholars are discussing "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Pss. 103:1). Fascinated by the concept that our internal organs also bless God, they note the difference between humans, who can draw a figure on a wall but cannot give it life, organs or a soul, and God who can give all these to anything he creates. The Babylonian Talmud points out that this difference is expressed by Hannah in 1 Samuel: "There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God" (2:2) - no painter can equal God. This interpretation of tzur as referring to the creation of shapes obviously does not explain the word in a literal manner.

A more literal approach appears in the following passage from the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Bava Kama): "Rabbi Hanina states, 'All those who say that God overlooks our sins jeopardize their lives, as it is written, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment" (Deut. 32:4).'"

This interpretation differs from the two options Ibn Ezra offers. It does not refer to God as constituting a secure refuge. Quite the contrary: He is seen as a being that can be as hard as stone. In light of this explanation, the week's reading warns the Israelites not to be complacent; they are entering a new land and, in their new life there, they must be careful to obey God's laws or face severe punishment. God has certain expectations of the Israelites and chiefly demands that they maintain the divine image in all aspects of behavior.

The poetry of Parashat Ha'azinu describes divine justice that is not tempered with mercy. God will not forgive all our sins simply because he loves us. We must know that all our actions will be judged by an exacting supreme judge. This reading, then, conveys a harsh message: Knowing our unique position as God's chosen people, we must not rest on our laurels and must not be lax when performing the commandments.

Rather surprisingly, King David uses tzur in a context reflecting Ibn Ezra's first suggestion: The word connotes God as a bastion, as a paternal shelter, rather than as an exacting judge. Since David's time, tzur has been seen as a reference to God as a protector, on whom we can always depend. Modern interpretations of the Bible have adopted this explanation. For example, in the "Da'at Mikra" edition of the Bible, Yehuda Kil comments, "The word

h a a r e t z

Portion of the Week / Solid as a rock

By Benjamin Lau

tzur refers to God, who is a bastion and a shelter for the righteous, like a rock and a mountain that can offer us protection."

It is interesting to note that this softened meaning of tzur - whereby the concept of shelter overshadows that of harsh judgment - appears in Israel's Declaration of Independence. The leaders of the Jewish state-in-the-making debated whether God should be mentioned in the declaration. A compromise of phrasing, using the word tzur, settled it: "Placing our trust in the Almighty (betzur yisrael)."

Religious Jews considered the phrase to be an allusion to Isaiah 30:29, where God is referred to as the Rock of Israel - "the mighty One of Israel." Secular Jews, on the other hand, interpreted it as referring to the Yishuv, the pre-state Jewish community, which demonstrated such strength and courage in the years preceding Israel's creation.

We will soon be celebrating the festival of Sukkot when we will enter the sukkah, and rely on God's protection. It is therefore appropriate to end this column with words from Psalm 27:1-5, which we began reciting in the month of Elul and will continue to recite for another week and a half: "A psalm by David, The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ... For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock."

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig (torah.org)

Parshas Haazinu / Yom Kippur

THE POWER OF SPEECH

"If a man makes a vow to Hashem..." (Bamidbar, 30:3)

In most communities, the Yom Kippur liturgy begins with Kol Nidrei, a service which dates back to the ninth century. The Kol Nidrei emphasizes the gravity that the Torah attaches to vows and oaths. Why is the most solemn day of the Jewish year introduced with the concept of oaths and vows? The Rambam records that the primary focus of the mitzva of repentance is the "viduy" - "confession; a person must verbalize the feelings of repentance which he harbors in his heart. Why is verbalization such an important facet of the repentance process?

Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, compiler of the Mishna, placed the Tractate of Nedarim - vows in the Order of Nashim, the Order which deals primarily with marriage and other interpersonal relationships. What connection does Nedarim have to marriage?

The Ramban records a Sifri which states that making a vow is akin to grasping "the life of the king" - "chayei hamelech", i.e. Hashem. What message is the Sifri attempting to convey?

When Hashem created Adam, the verse records that Hashem blew his soul into his nostrils. The Targum explains that this action imbued man with the ability to speak. Anthropomorphically, the Torah is conveying the message that Hashem blew part of Himself into man. Just as "the heaven was created with the words of Hashem" - "bedevar Hashem shamayim na'asu", man, through his Divinely imbued speech, can create new realities.⁵ It is this ability that enables man to take an object previously permitted to him and change its reality to one that is prohibited to him. Therefore, it is essential for a person who is repenting to verbalize his feelings, for it is the verbalization which creates his transformation, actualizing what he would like to become. Incredibly, by making an earnest verbal commitment he becomes a penitent; no trial period is necessary. Through speech alone, man can transform his reality.

The message of Kol Nidrei is that through our speech, we can effectuate our own transformation. Therefore, the concept of vows defines the nature of Yom Kippur, the day when we beseech Hashem to transform us through his forgiveness.

The only transaction in Jewish law which requires speech is the marriage ceremony, for communication is the most essential element of the entire relationship. Communication is the component necessary to transform two individuals into one reality. This is the message that Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi was conveying when he placed the Tractate of Nedarim, i.e. the ability to transform reality through speech, in the Order of Nashim, the laws of marriage and interpersonal relationships

FAMILY TIES

"...Ask your father and he will relate it to you, and your elders and they will tell you" (32:7)

The Torah relates that to prevent us from stumbling into the same pitfalls which caused us to err in the past, Moshe pleaded with Bnei Yisroel to take council with those who could educate and guide us: "Sh'al avicha veyageidcha, z'keinecha v'yomru lach". The Targum translates the verse as follows: "Ask your father and he will show you, your grandfather and he will tell you."¹ However, Rashi translates "avicha" as "prophets" and "z'keinecha" as "scholars". Why are prophets described as "fathers" and scholars as "grandfathers"? Why is the message of the father or prophet described as "haggada" while the message of the grandfather or scholar as "amira"?

The Baal Haturim comments that since the verse mentions three generations of Torah study, grandfather, father and son, such a bond with Torah can never be severed. To which unique method of education is the verse referring, that prevents the abandonment of Torah study?

The difference between "haggada" and "amira" is the following: Haggada denotes imparting information through the imposition of authority. Amira refers to relating information through explanation and understanding. A father has the responsibility to ensure that his child does not deviate from the path which he is required to follow. Since the father is accountable for the actions of his child there is a degree of inflexibility in the message which he delivers. Similarly, the function of the prophet is to relay Hashem's message to the people. He is not saddled with the task of ensuring that they understand why Hashem requires them to abide by His instructions, only that they obey them. Therefore, there can also be a level of inflexibility in the deliverance of the message. The grandfather accepts upon himself to educate the child, but he is not accountable for the child refusing to accept the message. He therefore has the flexibility to deliver the message in a manner which appeals to the child's understanding, and is not pressured into forcing the child to accept it at all costs. The scholar too, perceives his role as one who must attempt to explain Hashem's message in a manner which aids the people in their observance of the precepts. While the danger that the people might not accept his explanations always exists, it is not his responsibility if such a situation were to arise.

Each of these methods on its own cannot succeed. However, if they exist side-by-side, they dovetail with one another to deliver the complete educational package. Allowing a child the flexibility to use his intellectual capacities in his service of Hashem, while at the same time enforcing the notion that not everything must be understood in order to be observed, is the unique method of education which, as the Baal Haturim states, guarantees that Torah study will not be abandoned.

Hama'ayan (torah.org)

Edited by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Haazinu - 12 Tishrei 5769

Today's Learning: Bechorot 8:9-10 O.C. 205:4-206:1 Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 3 Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nedarim 27

Chazal say that the song contained in this parashah contains allusions to the past, the present, and the future (of this world), and the World-to-Come. Our Sages divided it into six parts (plus the concluding verses read by the seventh person). The first letters of each of the six aliyot spell "heh-zayin-yud-vav-lamed-kaf" (see last paragraph below).

R' Yitzchak Karo z"l (15th century; uncle of R' Yosef Karo) explains that the reason the midrash divides up the aliyot of this parashah, whereas it does not do so for any other parashah, is that this parashah contains alternating curses and blessings. If the gabbai or reader stopped in a place that the person receiving the aliyah didn't approve of, a fight would ensue. Alternatively, each one of the six sections is an allusion to a different aspect of G-d's relationship with man. For example, the first section describes G-d's kindness to mankind in general, the second describes His kindness to Yisrael in particular during their sojourn in the desert, the third part describes G-d's kindness to the Jewish People in their role as inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael, etc.

Also, R' Karo explains, this parashah ordinarily (though not this year) is read during the period of judgment. Thus, the midrash attempts to "brighten" our week with the allusion contained in the initials listed above: "Ha'ziv lach" / "The light is yours." (Toldot Yitzchak)

"Yeshurun became fat and kicked." (32:15)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes:

We have a tradition that there will be a spiritual revolt in Eretz Yisrael and among the Jewish People in the very era in which the national life of our People reawakens. The reason is that the material tranquility that part of our nation will experience will lead it to believe that it already has attained its ultimate goal, thus causing the soul to become smaller, so-to-speak. Yearning for lofty and holy ideals will cease, and, as a natural consequence, the spirit will sink. Eventually, a storm will come and cause a revolution, and then it will be apparent that Yisrael's strength lies in the Eternal Holy One, in the light of His Torah, and in the desire for spiritual light. (Orot p.84)

"Were they wise they would comprehend this, they would discern it from their end." (32:29)

R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the Alter of Kelm; died 1898) writes: It is human nature that simple folk follow the lead of wealthy individuals. What the wealthy declare to be good, the simple folk will desire. What the wealthy declare to be undesirable, the simple folk will disdain.

In contrast, very few individuals pay attention to what the King of the Universe desires. We are called upon to have Yirat Hashem / Fear and Awe of G-d, which Rashi interprets (in his commentary to Shabbat 31a) as despising that which G-d despises. Why is this the case? Simply because we are not aware of our obligations. Such knowledge can come about only through deep study and analysis. This is what our verse refers to when it states: "Were they wise they would comprehend this." If man would apply sufficient study and analysis to the matter, he would be very conscious of his eventual end and he would discern what his real task in this world is.

The Gemara (Shabbat 153a) relates that Rabbi Eliezer taught: "Repent one day before you die." His students asked, "Does one know when he will die?" "Therefore, one must repent every day," Rabbi Eliezer replied.

To whom was R' Eliezer speaking? R' Ziv asks. His students were not simpletons; rather, they included the likes of Rabbi Akiva. Therefore, there must be a deeper message in his words, specifically that one must always reflect on the approaching day of death. Only this can instill in a person proper Yirat Hashem. (Ha'sefer Ha'kattan ch.19)

"For I shall raise My hand to Heaven and say, 'As I (Anochi) live forever'." (32:40)

R' Moshe Hager shlita (the Vizhnitzer Rebbe in Bnei Brak, Israel) observes: Raising one's hands to Heaven refers to prayer. This verse teaches that one's prayer should be primarily motivated by a desire to increase G-d's honor, the honor of "Anochi" (a reference to G-d, as in the first word of the Ten Commandments). We are taught that the Shechinah shares in our pain (see Tehilim 91:15). [One way to understand this concept is that G-d created the world as an act of kindness, and He is disappointed (so-to-speak) when our deeds force Him to punish us.] Therefore, if we pray for the Shechinah's pain to end, any pain or suffering we are experiencing will necessarily end as well. (Sichot U'ma'amarei Kodesh p.213)

A related thought:

R' Mordechai Schwab z"l (1911-1994; mashgiach ruchani of Mesivta Bais Shraga in Monsey, New York) writes: We read in Shir Ha'shirim (5:2), "Open your heart to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, tamati / My perfection." The midrash comments: Read "tamati" as "te'omati" / "My twin." Just as one twin feels the other twin's pain, so Hashem feels our pain. (On other occasions, R' Schwab analogized Hashem's reaction to our suffering to the pain a surgeon would feel if he operated on his own child.)

R' Schwab adds: R' Yosef Karo z"l (1488-1575; author of the Shulchan Aruch) used to be visited regularly by an angel, whose teachings to R' Karo are recorded in the work Maggid Meisharim. The angel told R' Karo: If you knew and felt the pain that the Shechinah feels when you sin, you would be so saddened that you would be unable to enjoy the taste of food.

Furthermore, if we would focus all of our prayers solely on ending the suffering of the Shechinah (so-to-speak), we would be assured of being answered, and the Final Redemption would occur. (Kovetz Sichot Ma'amari Mordechai Vol. I, p.9)

The Etrog of the (Post-) Shemittah Year

Rambam writes (Hil. Shemittah Ve'yovel 8:11), "If one buys a lulav from an am ha'aretz during the shemittah, he [the seller] should give him [the buyer] an etrog as a gift. If he does not give it to him, he [the buyer] should pay for the lulav and etrog as a unit [in order not to buy the etrog outright]." (An "am ha'aretz" in this context means a person who is not meticulous in his observance of the agricultural laws.)

Although Rambam states that this halachah applies during the shemittah year, it is more likely to apply today in the year after the shemittah. The reason for this is that the status of an etrog, i.e., whether it is considered to be produce of shemittah, is determined "batar lekitah" / by the date of its harvesting. For example, an etrog that grew in 5767 (the year before shemittah) but was harvested during the year 5768 is produce of shemittah, while an etrog that grew in 5768 (the shemittah) but is harvested during 5769 is not produce of shemittah. (This rule is unique to etrogim. The status of all other fruits is determined "batar chanatah" / by the date their buds appeared.)

In Rambam's time and place, most people probably obtained etrogim close to home; therefore, the etrog that was used during the shemittah was likely to have been harvested during shemittah. Today, however, especially in the United States and Western Europe, the etrog used during shemittah is almost certain to have been harvested before the shemittah to allow time for shipping. It is the etrog used after the shemittah - this year - that likely was harvested during the shemittah.

Why is it forbidden to purchase an etrog of shemittah outright from an am ha'aretz? Because money given in exchange for produce of shemittah is considered to attain the sanctity of shemittah and is subject to many restrictions on how and when it is spent. In order not to place this "stumbling block" before the seller, it is preferable not to buy an etrog outright.

Note that the above is not an issue if the etrog is received from an "Otzar Bet Din." The reason is that one who "purchases" shemittah produce from an Otzar Bet Din is not paying the market value of the fruit but is merely defraying the costs of production and transportation. Indeed, in order to dispel any appearance of marketing the etrogim, they are sold in sealed containers sight-unseen.

Finally, note that an etrog from Eretz Yisrael must be treated with the sanctity of shemittah at all times, including after Sukkot.

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

TorahWeb Foundation

Weather Forecast for Sukkos: Cloudy

"You shall dwell in booths for a seven day period, every native in Israel shall dwell in booths so that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt; I am Hashem, your G-d"(Vayikra 23:42-43). Rashi, citing from the Gemarah Sukkah (11B) understands the above in accordance with the teaching of Rabbi Eliezer, that Suktahs are the annual commemoration of the ananei hakavod- Clouds of Glory in which Hashem enveloped the Jewish nation during their forty year trek in the desert. The "climate control" setting of these clouds provided air conditioning during the day and heat at night. It is no wonder we celebrate Hashem's Divine providence and protection. Yet one has to ask, given that the three shepherds that led the Jewish nation, Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, each contributed a major phenomenon - Moshe the mon, Miriam the be'er and

Aharon the ananei hakavod - why do we have a yom tov to commemorate Aharon's gift while the other two are seemingly neglected?

An answer to the above may be culled from the commentary of the Gra (Vilna Gaon) on the opening verses of Shir HaShirim, and his commentary Aderes Eliyahu on Shmos (34:10). The Tur (Orach Chaim 625) writes that Sukkos is observed at the time when people are returning to their homes after the Summer to clearly indicate that our exiting our homes is for the sake of the mitzvah as opposed to our personal comfort. The Gaon provides another reason why Sukkos is celebrated in the Fall and not in the Spring when we left Egypt. The Gra opines that since the yom tov of Sukkos is to remember Hashem's protective clouds, the Jewish nation were first introduced to the clouds immediately after the exodus, as the Torah (Shmos 13:21) informs us: "Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way". Why then do we not celebrate Sukkos in the Spring? We should conduct the Pesach Seder in the Sukkah.

The Gra answers that when Bnei Yisroel committed the sin of the golden calf (on the 17th of Tammuz) Hashem withdrew the clouds and His apparent benevolent protection from the people. It was only after Hashem pronounced "Solachti kidvorecha" (Bamidbar 14:20) on Yom Kippur, and after the people responded enthusiastically and generously with their wealth and willingness to the commandment to construct the Mishkan, that the clouds return.

What happened subsequently is most remarkable. The clouds did not only return, but they were of much greater magnitude. Whereas prior to the sin of the golden calf the clouds enveloped only the righteous members of the nation, they now provided TLC to all. This is how the Gra understands the verses immediately following the Thirteen Attributes of Hashem, and His forgiveness of the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf. Hashem said: "Behold! I seal a covenant before your entire people I shall make distinctions (wonders) such as have never been created in the entire world and among the nations, and the entire people among whom you are will see the work of Hashem- which is awesome- that I am about to do with you." (Shemos 34:10)

The wonders that the verse is referring to are the clouds that returned enveloping the entire nation. It is for this reason that Sukkos is celebrated in the Fall, as we are reliving the experience of the second set of Ananei HaKavod that appeared in the Fall, following Yom Kippur, not the first set that arrived in the Spring.

A most exciting phenomenon emerges: The Jewish nation backslid and sinned: they commit the grave sin of the golden calf, and then Moshe leads the nation in Teshuvah. Had Hashem restored the relationship to its prior state before their sin, that would have been dayeinu - sufficient. We would have celebrated the return of the Shechinah, Divine Presence. What happened was the extraordinary! The relationship between Hashem and the people was not only restored, but improved and enhanced.

The fact that Sukkos follows Yom Kippur is not accidental, nor coincidental, but is rather the actualization of one of the basic tenets of Yom Kippur. The latter not only has the capacity to atone, but as Reish Lakish teaches (Yuma 86B): Teshuvah that is performed b'ahavah, motivated by love of Hashem, has the ability to transform willful transgressions into merits! Thus Sukkos serves as an annual symbol and testimony of not only our renewed relationship with Hashem, but our improved one.

It is thus understandable why Sukkos enjoys the distinction of being the happiest Chag. Its very reference and identification in the prayers is Zman Simchaseinu. Moreover, every morning in the bracha prior to Shema, we proclaim "Ahava rabbah ahavtanu - with abundant love Hashem has loved us". The proof of that love is the next verse - "chemlah gedolah v'yesara chamalta oleinu - with exceedingly great pity have You pitied us". The Gra explains that this line refers to the great reversal that took place after the Golden Calf. Initially, Hashem says to Moshe, "I will destroy them and make a nation from you." After Moshe's prayers and the nation's Teshuvah, Hashem not only forgives, but extends His Divine Presence that was at Sinai for a brief period to dwell permanently in their midst in the Mishkan. Not a return of Shechinah, but an upgrade.

Finally, it is understandable why we have a holiday to celebrate Aharon's contribution of the Clouds more than Miriam's well and Moshe's mon.

The latter two were necessities. Hashem brought them into a desert, and thus He had to provide them with the basics of nourishment. But an improved all-weather comfort system for the entire nation that showed a special love and affection, that we excitedly reciprocate and return on Sukkos.

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