

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Parashas Haazinu is primarily the song/praise that Moshe taught the Children of Israel immediately prior to his death. G-d guaranteed that this song would never be forgotten (Devarim 31:21), and that when tragedy befalls them it will remind them that it was their actions that caused it. But precisely where does this song start?

The Rambam (Hilchos Sefer Torah 8:4) tells us that the words of the song are written in a specific way (two columns, rather than continuous lines), and that this starts from the word "haazinu." If you look at any Sefer Torah (or tikun that reprints its style), you can verify that the song of "Haazinu" starts from the very beginning of the Parasha (32:1). Rashi, however (Berachos 21a) implies that the song itself doesn't start until 32:4, as the Talmud uses 32:3 as the source for making a blessing before studying Torah: "When Moshe came to start the words of the song, he said to Israel, 'I will make a blessing first and you then answer "amen" after me - "when I call out in G-d's name" with a blessing, you should "attribute greatness to G-d" through your "amen." If this verse is the blessing before the song, then the song must not really start until the next verse! But if the song doesn't start until the fourth verse, why are the first three written as if they were also part of the song itself?

That first verse itself demands an explanation: "Pay attention, heavens, and I shall speak; and the earth shall hear the words of my mouth." Why, if Moshe is intending the message of the song for the nation, is he directing his words to the heaven and the earth? Rashi tells us that they were summoned as witnesses to the consequences of not following the Torah. But (as the Kli Yakar asks) how can inanimate objects serve as witnesses? What relevance do the heaven and earth have with warning the Children of Israel that they had better keep the Torah, or else?

Numerous answers have been given to this question, with two of the midrashic sources (Sifray and Tanchuma) quoted by Rashi. The first discusses the permanence of the heavens and the earth, which will be around long after Moshe has passed on. However, Rashi does not explain how this permanence is relevant to making them witnesses.

Let's consider, though, whom this song is addressed to. At the end of days, when most of the nation has left G-d and His Torah, they will experience terrible suffering. This song is designed to remind them of why the suffering happened, in order to spur them to return to G-d. Why did they abandon the ways of their ancestors? A common "excuse" heard is that the commandments were only intended for the generation they were given to, that they don't really apply anymore. Tying them in with the heaven and earth, which has been constant since the Torah was first given over 3,300 years ago, can be seen as a way of reminding us that G-d's commandments haven't changed either. The Succah we will IY"H sit in in a few short days is under the same sky that my father and grandfather's Succah sat under. As did the Succah built by their grandparents, going back thousands of years.

Just as the sky and ground remain essentially unchanged, so have G-d's laws, and we must keep the Torah today as it was kept back then. G-d's laws of physics haven't changed, and neither have his other laws. They are as relevant today as they were on the day they were first given.

Is that part of the song, or a prerequisite? The Talmud implies that the song hasn't started yet, but we still write it in the song's style, as without the message of the permanence of the Torah, the song has little relevance. The heaven and the earth aren't merely inanimate witnesses to a song taught long ago, but testify to the need to still keep the Torah, and therefore about the consequences of not keeping it.

As the Radak put it (Beraishis 49:2), "these (i.e. the opening) were the first words of divine inspiration," even if it wasn't part of the song itself. Perhaps this is why they are written as if they were part of the actual song. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The central theme of Yom Kippur is teshuva, commonly translated as "repentance." We hear so much about this term, but what, in fact does it truly mean?

On the simplest behavioral level, writes Maimonides, teshuvah involves "returning" to a situation in which one had previously failed, and not making the same mistake a second time. (Laws of Repentance 2:1) It means being given a second chance. No wonder,

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Yom Kippur has elements of joy. We celebrate being given a second chance. In too many of life's pursuits, we are given only one shot. If we miss, it's all over. On Yom Kippur, G-d says, "no matter if you have failed before; you can still return."

A chassid once asked his rebbe, "why pray on Yom Kippur, after all, we'll inevitably sin again." In response, the rebbe asked him to look out the window behind him. Outside was a toddler learning to walk. "What do you see?" asked the master. "A child, standing and falling," replied the disciple. Day after day the chassid returned to witness the same scene. At the week's end, the child stood and didn't fall. The child's eyes expressed the achievement of having attained the impossible. "So with us," said the rebbe. "We may fail again and again, but in the end, a loving G-d gives us the opportunities we need to succeed."

The mystics understand teshuvah differently. For them, teshuvah means "returning," to being righteous. But suppose one has never been righteous, what does one return to? Says the Sefat Emet, the soul of every person is fundamentally righteous. There may be a layer of evil obscuring the inner being, but all people created in the image of G-d are inherently good. Teshuvah then, means to return to the inner kernel of goodness we all possess. And so, we sing, and dance on Yom Kippur. We celebrate the opportunity to discover our true selves.

Another classic story. Reb Zusha was on his death bed, and tears were streaming down his face. "Why are you crying?" asked his disciples. "If G-d asks me why I wasn't like Moses or Maimonides," answered Reb Zusha, "I'll say, I wasn't blessed with that kind of leadership ability and wisdom." But I'm afraid of another question," continued Reb Zusha, "what if G-d asks, 'Reb Zusha, why weren't you like Reb Zusha? Why didn't you find your inner being and realize your inner potential? Why didn't you find yourself?' That is why I am crying."

A third approach. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, among many other thinkers, understands teshuvah to mean "answer." That is to say teshuvah is a dialogue. On Yom Kippur we stand before G-d, a caring G-d who asks the question(s). We offer the answer(s). A G-d of love seeks us out. As much as we are in search of Him, He is in search of us. A comforting thought on Yom Kippur.

Yet another chassidic legend. A young girl came to the Ba'al Shem Tov - the father of chassidism "Why do you cry?" the rebbe lovingly asked. "I was playing hide and seek," said the young girl, "but no one came looking for me." "So, too, is it with G-d," reflected the Ba'al Shem Tov. "He, too, is crying. For as much as He is looking for us, we rarely look for Him."

It was left for Rav Avraham Yitzchak ha-Cohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel to offer an understanding related to the establishment of the modern State of Israel. Teshuvah, according to Rav Kook, ought be understood eschatologically. It quite literally means "go home," to our homeland. It is not only an individual quest, but a communal mandate to establish a land that is different from all others. A land that is a light to the nations of the world: a land that marks the dawn of redemption, a land at peace. © 2003 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

One of the most colorful and engaging Festivals of the Hebrew calendar is Sukkot, the Festival of Huts (Booths) or Tabernacles-and in the difference between these two translations lies the major issue of this commentary. There is a great deal of pageantry in actually building and living in a miniature kind of new habitation for seven days (or eight, in the Diaspora); the earthy greens and yellows of the vegetative ceiling (sekhakh) from whose openings we must be able to see the sky, the magnificently decorated make-shift walls emblazoned with fruits and vegetables, colorful depictions of Holy Temple celebrations bringing together past glories and future expectations, and the benign portraits and/or Biblical quotations about our special Sukkah guests, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David (and nowadays many add the matriarchs, Miriam, Zipporah and Deborah). Especially the children in my family looked forward to Sukkot more than to any other holiday- despite the interrupting rains we had to suffer in Manhattan during the Israeli harvest season.

But what is the real symbolism of the sukkah, what is it that we are attempting to recreate? The Sages of Talmud engage in a very fundamental dispute, with R. Akiba maintaining that the sukkah represents the actual temporary huts or booths our ancestors had to set up in the desert, and R. Yishmael arguing that the sukkah expresses the clouds of Divine glory, the rays of Divine Splendor, which encompassed the Israelites during their sojourn (B.T. Sukkah 11b); R. Akiba would call it the Festival of Huts (or Booths) and R. Yishmael the Festival of Tabernacles (Divine Sanctuary).

And this dispute is not merely a theoretical one: Rav Haym Soloveitchik maintains that the commandment of sukkah must be performed with specific intention and understanding, since the bible

enjoins us "to dwell in the sukkah for seven days... in order that your future generations shall know (and understand in a precise manner) that I (the Lord) enabled the Israelites to dwell in sukkot when I took them out of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 23:42,43). So what are we experiencing in our sukkah? Is it the makeshift huts of our wanderings through the various deserts of our exiles- despite which we nevertheless managed to survive-or is it the majestic and impregnable Divine fortress of protection and spirituality which encircled us throughout the desert experience? Is the sukkah a hut or a tabernacle?

Fascinatingly enough, the official Codes of Jewish Law, the 16th century Shulhan Arukh, compiled by Rav Yosef Karo, decodes the issue: " You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days... because I enabled the Israelites to dwell in sukkot': these are the clouds of glory which encompassed them so that they would not be smitten by the dry heat and sun..." (Orah Haim 425,1). There is certainly a logic to this decision. Jewish Law likewise maintains that "one who is uncomfortable is freed from the obligation of dwelling in a sukkah", which is defined as the wind or the flies making it impossible to sleep in the sukkah or rain spoiling the soup you are about to eat in the sukkah (Orah Haim 640, 4).

Now generally speaking, discomfiture is not a valid reason for exempting an individual from a mitzvah obligation. I have never heard it said that a person whose ear drums are discomfited by the loud music at weddings need not perform the commandment of helping the bride and groom rejoice! Apparently, therefore, there must be something intrinsic to the sukkah which makes it incompatible with discomfiture. If the sukkah symbolizes the desert booth, there must certainly have been uncomfortable invasions by desert creatures and a pounding hot sun which would make sitting in such a sukkah intolerable; nevertheless, so did the Israelites live for forty years. Only if we maintain that the sukkah expresses Divine clouds of glory, impervious to any foreign element of annoyance, would it make sense to rule that one who is uncomfortable need not sit in our sukkot today.

I would argue, however, that perhaps the Talmud is teaching us another lesson entirely. The sukkot in the desert were actual make-shift huts, temporary dwelling whose occupants were vulnerable prey to all the hazards of difficult desert living conditions. But since they felt that they were living under Divine protection, that the G-d who had freed them from Egyptian slavery was still watching over them, they experienced themselves encompassed by rays of Divine splendor and they, the Israelites, became impervious to discomfiture. I believe that this is the message of the Holy Zohar:

"It was taught to the people of the world that anyone who has a share in the our holy nation and our holy land will dwell in the shadow of Divine faith and

receive the sacred guests who will bring joy in this world and in the world to come" (Emor, 2 78).

Whether your sukkah is a silo or a sanctuary depends on whether or not you feel that Your nation and your lands is under the loving protective covering of the Divine, come what may.

It is told that Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev would sit in the sukkah and continue to eat, sing and study Torah during the worst rain storms. One of his disciples cited the Shulchan Arukh: "If rains fall, one must (leave the sukkah) and go into the house... Anyone who is freed from the commandment of sukkah (because he is uncomfortable) and still does not leave it, will not receive any reward; he is considered a commoner (Greek, idiot)" (Orah Haim 639). Responded Rav Levi Yitzchak: Indeed, anyone who can be dwelling within the Divine Rays of Splendor and still feel uncomfortable is truly a commoner!"

Perhaps the deepest message of the sukkah is that true joy and comfort stems not from a fancy palatial residence replete with expensive oak furnishings and chandeliers, but rather from familial love and togetherness within the backdrop of our Biblical guests and under the protection of a loving G-d. As the Talmud teaches, "When our love was strong, we could lie on the edge of metal implement and there was sufficient room; now that our love is no longer strong, a bed of sixty cubits is not large enough." (B.T. Sanhedrin 7a). © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

Parsha Insights

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

Throughout the long history of Klal Yisrael, we have never lacked human resources-i.e., we have always enjoyed a complete spectrum of spiritually talented people. This phenomenon of the completeness of Klal Yisrael is not mere coincidence.

Rather, it was lovingly and wisely prepared for us by HaShem from the beginning of our existence. We find this wondrous concept revealed in the Hazinu song (Devarim 32:6): Is He not your Father, your Master? Has He not created you and established you?

Rashi comments on this verse: Has He not created you-a nation amongst the nations of the world; and established you-afterwards on every kind of firm base and foundation: out of your midst come your priests, out of your midst come your Levites, out of your midst come your kings-a city which has everything.

The Torah here divulges that if a nation needs to 'import its talent'-it is not a nation. Whereas, Klal Yisrael is a nation that is self-contained- a precious treasure of endless depths. Completeness that comes from within is not a natural state. For instance, there is no nation in the world that does not have to import advisors from other nations.

Yet, from our very inception, HaShem has planned-and prepared for us- a fertile and abundant source of all the elements needed to create a total spiritual nation. When we reflect on the endless stream of distinguished and illustrious leaders of our people throughout history-from Avraham Avinu to the Chofetz Chaim-we realize that HaShem has prepared us for success from ancient times until today.

Each Jew is specially gifted, so that together the contribution of each member of Klal Yisrael blends together forming a spiritually perfect nation. May we recognize the special quality in ourselves, and in others, that form us into Am Segulah-the most treasured nation.

Implement: Contemplate on the special gift that each one of your family members brings to the family. *[Based on Da'as Torah of Rav Yerucham HaLevi] © 2005 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The epic poem of Ha'azinu ends with the following verse: "Nations, praise His nation, for He will avenge the blood of His slaves. And He will avenge His enemies, and atone for His land, His people" [Devarim 32:43]. The last phrase, declaring that G-d will "atone for His land, His people," is difficult to understand and to put into a proper context. Many commentators have proposed different ways to understand it. For example, Rashi links the last two words as if they were connected by the word "and"- "He will compensate His land and His people for the troubles that they had, which were caused by the enemy." Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, implies that the "land" will serve as atonement for the "people"- "In my opinion, this means that the people will atone for the land, like in the verse, 'stones wore down the water' [Iyov 14:19] (that is, the real meaning is the reverse, the water has eroded the stones)... What this means is that Yisrael will avenge the other nations, making atonement for Eretz Yisrael because of the blood that was spilled in the land." However, both of these commentaries leave an unanswered question. Why is this verse written in such a complicated way and not in simple and straightforward language?

Perhaps the phrase can be explained in a different way. We must remember that a link between blood and atonement appears in other places in the Torah, as has been noted by Ibn Ezra. For example, we are told, "The land will not be forgiven for the blood that was spilled on it, except for by the blood of the one who spilled it. And you shall not contaminate the land where you live, where I dwell." [Bamidbar 35:33-34]. This implies that blood spilled on the land causes it to be impure, and the contamination can only be removed by spilling the blood of the guilty person. The conclusion is

that the land is harmed by the spilling of blood, since this is the land where the Almighty dwells.

A different point of view can be seen in another place. A calf is beheaded when there is an unidentified murder in an area, and the atonement is achieved by killing the calf, as a symbol of the blood of the anonymous killer. In that case, the atonement does not refer to the land but to the nation, as is noted in the prayer recited by the elders: "Forgive your nation, Yisrael, whom you redeemed, G-d, and do not let innocent blood be spilled among your nation, Yisrael. And the blood will be avenged." [Devarim 21:8]. Thus, in this case, we are taught that if innocent blood is spilled the entire nation is in need of atonement, as part of the responsibility of the community for an unfortunate individual.

With this in mind, we can return to the problematic phrase, "He will atone for His land, His people." The atonement is a dual one, for the nation and for the land. But the word "and" was not written here on purpose, because that would have implied that one of the two elements is secondary to the other one. The way the phrase is written shows that each factor- the land and the nation- needs its own atonement for the spilling of blood. This will be achieved by the spilling of the blood of those who were responsible, as is written in the preceding verse, "I will make my arrows intoxicated with blood and my sword will devour flesh, from the blood of the killed and the captured, from the first wild actions of the enemy." [Devarim 32:42]. Spilling the blood of the enemies of Bnei Yisrael will thus be the basis for atonement for both the land and the nation.

Days of Repentance and Days of Faith

by Rabbi Moshe Klein, Rabbi of the Neighborhood Kefar Ganin, Petach Tikvah, and Deputy Head of the Conversion Authority

Rosh Hashanah, the Ten Days of Penitence, and Yom Kippur are over, and we are in the midst of the happy days of Succot. Thoughtful people have delved into the connection between the days of penitence and the days of happiness. Repentance and searching the soul remove some of the joy of life. Self reckoning leads to internal pain and less happiness. And then the time of happiness arrives, and we are able to make up for what we lost during the beginning of the month. However, the days of Succot also have an aspect of strengthening faith.

The author of Sefat Emet discusses the link between faith and happiness. "The mitzva of Succah is the trait of faith in the Almighty. As our sage taught, 'Leave your permanent dwelling.' Do not trust your possessions, put your faith in G-d alone. That is why this is the time of our happiness, because there is no greater happiness than that of one who truly has faith in G-d." All year round it is necessary to teach faith, but this is especially needed at the beginning of a new year. Rosh Hashanah is called the time "when our holiday is

hidden" [Tehillim 81:4], because the results of the judgment remain a secret. Secrecy is difficult for a person, as is written, "You hid your face, and I was frightened" [30:8]. In the beginning of the year, we do not know what will happen to us and how the future will develop, what was decided about us on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur. We hope and pray that we were written down for a good life, but the Divine decision is hidden from us, and every day during the new year reveals more about what was decided at the beginning of the year. We leave the days of judgment with fear and trepidation: What will happen? Will we experience better days than in the past? And then the days of Succot arrive, days of joy and a showing of faith, when we reveal that we put our faith in G-d and anticipate His salvation.

This corresponds to the way Abarbanel explains the verse, "And Yaacov was very frightened, and he was upset" [Bereishit 32:8]. Yaacov was not afraid because of a lack of faith, rather "his fear was that of a true warrior, who fears death and is aware of danger when he enters battle." The fear, which is a natural reaction at this point, is what leads to great faith that the Almighty will help Yaacov in his meeting with his brother. Fear leads to faith, and the greater and more intense the fear the greater will be the faith that results in the heart of the believer. As a result of Yaacov's natural fear, his faith that the Almighty will rescue him grew.

The start of a new year is a time of optimism, since it brings a new beginning. We have the opportunity to wake up tomorrow morning and begin a new life, with a clean slate. However, there is also an element of natural fear, since we do not know where we are headed and what the coming days will contain. So we must also show an element of faith. When hope and faith are intermingled we can hope for better days. We are at a time of a beginning, we hope that we are headed for better times and we believe that this faith will give us the strength to fulfill our destiny of mending the world as part of the kingdom of G-d.

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar by quoting the Gemara in Yoma (2b): "Seven days before Yom Kippur, the kohein gadol (the High Priest) would be away from his wife [in preparation for the] one day."

So far, so good. But then the Sfas Emes moves on to a theme that seems totally unrelated to what came before. He tells us that Yom Kippur is unique. How? Because this is the one day in the year in which this world (olam hazeh) even distantly resembles the world-to-come (olam haba). How so? Because by not eating or drinking on Yom Kippur, we take on the behavior of mal'achim ("angels"-who do not eat or drink).

The Sfas Emes continues here to develop a new perspective on some features of Yom Kippur. He starts by noting another way in which Yom Kippur resembles olam haba. In the world-to-come, life is le'ma'ala min ha'teva (i.e., unconstrained by Nature). So, too, on Yom Kippur, we can more easily conduct ourselves in a way that defies normal rules of human behavior.

What behavior does the Sfas Emes have in mind when he says that, in principle, we can conduct ourselves in a manner that is "le'ma'ala min ha'teva"? He has in mind Teshuva ("return to one's true self"; repentance). For Teshuva requires changing one's behavior. And if you think about it, you will soon agree that such change is truly "above" Nature. How so? Because Nature would have a person's past misconduct continue, and thus reinforce itself. As the proverb says: "Hergeil na'aseh teva". That is, a person's habitual behavior becomes his (second) nature.

Into this context comes Teshuva, transforming the person's long-time way of living. Such change is "above Nature"; i.e., "supernatural". Hence, the close fit between Teshuva and Yom Kippur, the most "holy" (that is, le'ma'ala min ha'teva) day in the year.

Continuing in this vein, the Sfas Emes tells us that Yom Kippur is also the day in the year in which Teshuva is most feasible. In support of this statement, the Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Tehillim (139:16). (Before you see this pasuk, be aware that it is exceptionally hard to translate. Also, I am not sure whether the English translation makes it easier or harder to understand.) With this warning in mind, here is the pasuk: "Galmi ra'u ei'necha, ve'al sif're'cha kulam yi'ka'seivu; ya'mim yu'tzaru ve'lo echad ba'hem." (ArtScroll: "Your eyes saw my unshaped form, and in Your book all were recorded; though they will be fashioned through many days, to Him they are one.")

What is this pasuk saying? Read on and see.

The pasuk is saying: one day in the year is unique ("ve'lo echad ba'hem"). Unique in what way? Unique inasmuch as on that day, one can more easily break out of the mold within which we are constrained and to which the pasuk refers ("Galmi ra'u ei'necha..."). On which day of the year are we granted this special chessed that reforming ourselves is easier? Rashi-quoting Yalkut Shim'oni on the pasuk-answers: "Zeh Yom HaKippurim".

The Sfas Emes has given us new perspectives on some basic features of Yom Kippur. He has told us not to regard our fasting on Yom Kippur as a negative (e.g., as a punishment). On the contrary, he views our fasting on Yom Kippur in potentially positive terms. For ideally fasting can put us in the mode of the mal'achim, who neither eat nor want to eat. Our fasting on Yom Kippur makes that one day in the year in which we demonstrate (to ourselves) our ability to live in a state above our physical wants. That liberation can make it

easier to aspire to live at a higher level of ruchniyus the rest of the year.

The Sfas Emes has also taught us not to see our fasting as a "stand-alone" mitzva. Instead, we should view our fasting as part of a comprehensive spiritual CARE package designed to help us reach a higher level of ruchniyus. The Sfas Emes articulated this possibility when he said that on Yom Kippur, we can experience some olam haba.

Thus, note the contrast between fasting on Yom Kippur and fasting on Tish'a Be'Av. Fasting on Tish'a Be'Av conveys a message of bereavement and mourning. By contrast, the Sfas Emes has told us to view fasting on Yom Kippur as an instance in which we strive to rise above our physical needs. The message conveyed can be the aspiration for a life with more spirituality. The difference in messages comes out clearly if we consider the very different moods of these two fasting days. Tish'a Be'Av is a sad day; Yom Kippur can be a happy day.

The Sfas Emes's other lesson focuses on Teshuva. Changing one's behavior- i.e., Teshuva-is the ultimate in le'ma'ala min ha'teva, and hence, very hard to do. But help is at hand. HaShem has designated Yom Kippur as the day in the year on which overcoming Nature-that is, transforming ourselves by doing Teshuva-is unusually feasible.

Before concluding, we must address one more question. We know-from long experience-that the disparate parts of a Sfas Emes ma'amar all fit neatly together. We may therefore wonder: why did the Sfas Emes begin this ma'amar with the quotation from the Gemara in Yoma? To a naive observer, that quotation seems totally unconnected with the rest of the ma'amar.

I suggest that we can find a possible answer if we have another look at the text: "Seven days... the one day ". Adding these two numbers gives us the number eight-a number well known to indicate special kedusha. For example, bris mila takes place on the eighth day. Likewise, Shemini Atzeres is a day of unique kedusha. Most tellingly, the significance of the text-

"Seven days... the one day"-is clear if we consider another context in which the Gemara makes the very same statement. Chazal make that statement in the context of the seven days of the Mishkan's inauguration. As with the kohein gadol and Yom Kippur, the seven days were preparation for (Vayikra, 9:1) they guessed it-eighth day ("...bayom ha'shemini.")

What is special about the number eight? A cube-the prototype of a "thing"; i.e., Nature-has six sides. With its internal point, a cube has seven aspects. If Nature (teva) is seven, eight is le'ma'ala min ha'teva-above and unconstrained by Nature. As we have seen, Yom Kippur is about Teshuva. Teshuva, in turn, is about trying to live "le'ma'ala min ha'teva". Similarly, fasting is also a prime feature of Yom Kippur. For a human being to abstain from food and drink for 26 hours is also behavior unconstrained by Nature.

Hence, we can appreciate the care with which the Sfas Emes crafted this ma'amar. Thus, he began by citing the passage from Yoma which refers to the number "eight". Referring to that number immediately brings to mind "le'ma'ala min ha'teva." And that reference sets the stage for the Sfas Emes's discussion of two features of Yom Kippur-fasting and Teshuva.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There are songs and there are songs. The song of Moshe and the people of Israel at Yam Suf is a song of victory and exultation. It is read in the synagogue with a special haunting melody that accompanies it. It is recited every morning in our daily prayer service and it is referred to every evening in the Maariv service. It is a song of hope and triumph. The song of Haazinu, which is read in this week's Torah reading is of an entirely different nature. It carries no special melody with it, its content is mainly dark and somber and it forms no part of any Jewish prayer service. It is a song of realism, not based on any special event or wondrous miracle as is the song of Yam Suf. Notwithstanding this, it is the song that has accompanied Israel in its long journey through time and space and it is this song that has allowed Israel to persevere and triumph in spite of the challenges and vicissitudes of that journey.

Moshe does not minimize the dangers and hardships of the journey. Nevertheless, he guarantees Israel's success and ultimate redemption. The song of Haazinu was the song chosen to be committed to memory by Jewish children over the ages. The song of Yam Suf was not so chosen. Hardheaded realism, honest discussion of problems and ironclad faith in the face of adversity always trumps temporary miracles no matter how impressive the latter may be. Moshe's song of Haazinu is his last great bequest to Israel. Its value and importance has never diminished over the millennia.

Our grandson, Eliezer Wein, will be celebrating his bar mitzvah here in Jerusalem this parsha of Haazinu. I pray that G-d grant him all blessings and great accomplishments. But I also pray that he internalize within him this message of the song of Haazinu. In that song is the entire history of his heritage and past. It also contains the outline of his future and of the tasks that lie before him as a faithful and loyal Jew. The message and predictions of the song are inescapable. The covenant between G-d and Israel is an unbreakable one with no escape clauses built into it. The song of Haazinu with its demands and challenges is indelibly committed to the collective memory of the Jewish people. It accompanies us, nationally and personally, throughout our lives and their events. It is the witness to our achievements and weaknesses, our

progress and regressions. Moshe calls on heaven and earth to hear this song for it will never be forgotten from the hearts and souls of the eternal people of Israel. The song, so to speak, has become part of the natural order of things in the world. By measuring our lives and actions by the yardstick that the song lays out for us, we can determine our correct course in life. Every choice in life demands first listening to Haazinu before making choices. Ultimately, Haazinu is the song of soaring hope and human achievement. Mazal tov, Eliezer and learn the song! © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

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A Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Succot does not occur frequently in the Jewish calendar. Most years, the Torah portion of Haazinu is connected to the theme of repentance of Shabbat Shuva. But after davening Malchiyot, Zichronot, and Shofrot, and prior to beginning Bereishit, we have a different perspective on the historical themes of Haazinu as narrated by Ramban.

HaShem created the world with the goal of giving the Torah to the Jewish people. However, He first made Adam, and then ten generations later He brought Noah into the scene. Abraham, the first Jew, would appear on the horizon in another ten generations. This history is also recorded in the fifth chapter of Pirkei Avot.

Adam is given one mitzvah - to recognize G-d - which he fails to uphold when he eats of the forbidden tree in the garden. There is no covenant attached to the prohibition. He is merely to acknowledge G-d's presence by refraining from eating from only one or two of the many trees allotted for his pleasure. There is no expectation that he will pass this prohibition on to his children or influence the world around him in its observance. This is in keeping with concept of Malchiyot, the ontological acceptance of G-d as King as the first stage in the ascent to Judaism.

Noah, on the other hand, is given seven laws of ethics and morality, which he is to pass on to his children. He is a man of religion, adhering to the letter of the law, but there is no deep commitment in passing religion on to his children, or in influencing the world around him. Although Noah follows G-d's instruction in taking 100 years to build the Ark, all the while hoping to dissuade others from their corruption. Upon departing from the Ark, Noah, however, violates the spirit of the law by becoming drunk and thereby turning him into an object of ridicule to his children.

Noah's covenant with G-d is expressed in a rainbow, which is a reflection of Noah's inherently passive expectations. Noah did not bring the rainbow, just as it was not brought by the rest of nature; animals, plants and the inanimate. Noah does not influence others in his society, and he fails to pass on ethical and moral values to his children. Noah's acceptance of G-d ultimately dwindles to his children's rebellion through their building of the tower of Babel. The tower represents man's unification to neutralize spiritual influences. Zichronot (remembering Noah, etc.) therefore, is the second stage in the ascent to Judaism - the acceptance of religion in general, in addition to the acceptance of the Creator as King.

Abraham, as the first Jew, does not merely have religion but is infused to his core with a commitment to G-d. He influences the world around him, and he can pass on his value system to the next generation. Abraham's covenants are reflections of his active pursuit of his expectations. The first covenant G-d makes with Abraham is through the means of sacrifices, which requires the fire of G-d to pass through the parts of a split animal. From there he proceeds to do the brit milah, the sign of G-d on man's body.

The call to Abraham is reflected in Shofrot, when he is asked to go beyond the letter of the law and follow the commands of G-d, even when they go against his dreams, his longing for his children to continue in his ways. This is the Akedah epic.

The well-known phrase "walking with G-d" is reflected in the Torah's presentation of Adam's heirs as walking behind G-d, Noah walking with G-d, and Abraham walking ahead of G-d. Adam's heir, Hanoch, was taken from this world because he couldn't keep up with G-d. Noah slipped when G-d was not at his side, by becoming drunk and acting silly. Abraham grew up in a world of idols, but still managed to discover G-d on his own: He walked ahead of G-d - anticipating on his own what G-d wants.

Before we can first get to an Abraham, we have to begin with an Adam and a Noah. It is a step-by-step process: First the acceptance of the Creator and as King, then the acceptance of religion in general and finally, the drive to bring into fruition what G-d really wants. G-d wants the world to be ethical and moral, and He needs the Jewish people, who at Sinai, became a nation by the echo of the Shofar. Their task is to mentor the rest of the world in appropriate behavior. You can be a good person without being Jewish. But you can't be a Jewish person without the extra commitment of holiness, a few or several steps beyond merely being good. Jews live by the maximal covenant, but the rest of the world can live by the minimal covenant. The Jewish people begin as individual forefathers. These forefathers develop into families in Egypt, and the families in turn become a nation. G-d now wants us to have a document such as the Haazinu prophecy to remind us Jews that when we are not exemplary, we fail

to live up to what G-d expects of us, but when we repent and become exemplary, we truly are living up to His expectations.

When the enemy overpowers the Jews, it is a reminder that in order to adhere to their destiny, Jews must be more than merely good. Today, there is an opportunity for them to return to that destiny, by repenting the old ways and building a new and vibrant Torah life for the future.

In many sections of greater New York and cities around America, there are synagogues with declining congregations. Once flourishing Jewish communities are now a shadow of what they formerly were. To the credit of the remaining hearty souls, they are refusing to be that last person who turns out the lights. Daily minyans are continuing, mostly attended by elderly Jews. Yes, there seems to be no prospects for growth, as there are no new Jewish families moving into the community.

The only Jewish communities that are growing are Orthodox. Young Orthodox families from overcrowded Orthodox communities are continuing to look for more reasonable areas in which to reside. They would be happy to move to a community with an existing strong Jewish infrastructure. The Traditional Jews of our declining Jewish neighborhoods, however, have done nothing to attract these young Orthodox families who are committed to the spread of Judaism.

Part of the problem has been the focus of the non-Orthodox on synagogues to maintain Jewish life. The Orthodox, however, set up yeshivot and residences for Orthodox Jews. Judaism has always been more than just prayer. As important as that was for the older Traditional generation, Jewishly knowledgeable families, on the other hand, raise committed Jewish children who will build upon the accomplishments of the older generation. Today, thank G-d, we see kollelim coming into many communities that will help perpetuate Jewish learning, so that even the so-called Traditional Jew might grow in his Judaism.

Haazinu is a record of what can happen to a Jewish community, no matter how vibrant, when it strays from the traditional purpose for Jewish institutions. Perpetuating synagogues, and promoting spiritual consciousness is what Adam and Noah are all about. Shofrot reminds us that the Jews have a unique destiny of sacrifice (as expressed at the Akedah) and Torah study (as at Sinai). The content of the Haazinu poem tells us how we have erred, but it also gives us the guidance we need so we may, after all, reach the pinnacle of the Jewish ladder. The ladder currently may be broken, but with careful deliberation, a Jewish renaissance and the promotion of Torah study in general, we will have moved from Rosh HaShanah, the birthday of Adam, to Succot, a reminder of our 40 year trek in the desert, where we became a Torah observant and Torah studious nation. © 2005 National Council of Young Israel

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

“For their mighty one is not like our Almighty, yet our enemies sit in judgement.” (Deuteronomy 32:31)

"For their mighty one is not like our Almighty"-
RASHI: "All this the enemies should have understood, that Hashem delivered them, and victory is neither theirs nor their G-ds' for until now their G-ds were powerless against our Almighty (our Tzur), for their rock is not like our Rock. The word "tzur" in the Scripture always denotes a rock."

Rashi offers a simple explanation of these words. The enemies' victories over Klal Yisroel should have been understood by these very same enemies as a miraculous victory-one dictated by G-d, inasmuch as these enemies were never able to subdue Israel in the past.

This is all very clear. But Rashi's last words are puzzling. He explains the meaning of the (quite common) word "Tzur" as rock. Not only is this word a common one, but it has already appeared about six times in this parsha already! If Rashi thought we didn't know its meaning, why didn't he explain it earlier? This is a real puzzle, and understanding it will show you Rashi's unique genius. Hint: Is this verse different from the previous verses, in any significant way?

An Answer: The word "tzur" can mean either "rock" or "creator," as in "Yotzer ohr." Rashi makes it clear that it does not (in a p'shat sense) mean "creator." In all the previous verses when the Torah uses the word "tzur" it refers to the G-d of Am Yisroel. This is the first time that the Torah uses the word "tzur" to refer to their G-ds. Therefore this is the first time it is necessary for Rashi to be quite clear that the word does not mean "creator." That couldn't be so, since here the reference is to idols. But all previous uses of this word in our parsha referred to Hashem, therefore Rashi saw no need to correct any "misunderstanding" since if we translate "tzur" as "creator" and not as "rock" that too would be appropriate, because G-d is The Creator.

We see here a very unusual sensitivity on Rashi's part to the student's understanding of the text. Rashi steps in only when he thinks it is necessary, and not otherwise. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org



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