

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

"That very day the Lord spoke to Moses, 'Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people...For you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel.'"

With these words there draws to a close the life of the greatest hero the Jewish people has ever known: Moses, the leader, the liberator, the lawgiver, the man who brought a group of slaves to freedom, turned a fractious collection of individuals into a nation, and so transformed them that they became the people of eternity.

It was Moses who mediated with God, performed signs and wonders, gave the people its laws, fought with them when they sinned, fought for them when praying for Divine forgiveness, gave his life to them and had his heart broken by them when they repeatedly failed to live up to his great expectations.

Each age has had its own image of Moses. For the more mystically inclined sages Moses was the man who ascended to Heaven at the time of the giving of the Torah, where he had to contend with the Angels who opposed the idea that this precious gift be given to mere mortals. God told Moses to answer them, which he did decisively. "Do angels work that they need a day of rest? Do they have parents that they need to be commanded to honour them? Do they have an evil inclination that they need to be told, 'Do not commit adultery?'" (Shabbat 88a). Moses the Man out-argues the Angels.

Other Sages were more radical still. For them Moses was Rabbenu, "our Rabbi" -- not a king, a political or military leader, but a scholar and master of the law, a role which they invested with astonishing authority. They went so far as to say that when Moses prayed for God to forgive the people for the Golden Calf, God replied, "I cannot, for I have already vowed, 'One who sacrifices to any God shall be destroyed'" (Ex. 22:19), and I cannot revoke My vow." Moses replied, "Master of the Universe, have You not taught me the laws of annulling vows? One may not annul his

own vow, but a Sage may do so." Moses thereupon annulled God's vow (Shemot Rabbah 43:4).

For Philo, the 1st century Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Moses was a philosopher-king of the type depicted in Plato's Republic. He governs the nation, organises its laws, institutes its rites and conducts himself with dignity and honour; he is wise, stoical and self-controlled. This is, as it were, a Greek Moses, looking not unlike Michelangelo's famous sculpture.

For Maimonides, Moses was radically different from all other prophets in four ways. First, others received their prophecies in dreams or visions, while Moses received his when awake. Second, to the others God spoke in parables obliquely, but to Moses He spoke directly and lucidly. Third, the other prophets were terrified when God appeared to them but of Moses it says, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11). Fourth, other prophets needed to undergo lengthy preparations to hear the Divine word; Moses spoke to God whenever he wanted or needed to. He was "always prepared, like one of the ministering angels" (Laws of the Foundations of Torah 7:6).

Yet what is so moving about the portrayal of Moses in the Torah is that he appears before us as quintessentially human. No religion has more deeply and systemically insisted on the absolute otherness of God and Man, Heaven and Earth, the infinite and the finite. Other cultures have blurred the boundary, making some human beings seem godlike, perfect, infallible. There is such a tendency -- marginal to be sure, but never entirely absent -- within Jewish life itself: to see sages as saints, great scholars as angels, to gloss over their doubts and shortcomings and turn them into superhuman emblems of perfection. Tanakh, however, is greater than that. It tells us that God, who is never less than God, never asks us to be more than simply human.

Moses is a human being. We see him despair and want to die. We see him lose his temper. We see him on the brink of losing his faith in the people he has



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been called on to lead. We see him beg to be allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the land he has spent his life as a leader travelling toward. Moses is the hero of those who wrestle with the world as it is and with people as they are, knowing that "It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it."

The Torah insists that "to this day no one knows where his grave is" (Deut. 34:6), to avoid his grave being made a place of pilgrimage or worship. It is all too easy to turn human beings, after their death, into saints and demigods. That is precisely what the Torah opposes. "Every human being" writes Maimonides in his Laws of Repentance (5:2), "can be as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Jeroboam."

Moses does not exist in Judaism as an object of worship but as a role model for each of us to aspire to. He is the eternal symbol of a human being made great by what he strove for, not by what he actually achieved. The titles conferred by him in the Torah, "the man Moses," "God's servant," "a man of God," are all the more impressive for their modesty. Moses continues to inspire.

On 3 April 1968, Martin Luther King delivered a sermon in a church in Memphis, Tennessee. At the end of his address, he turned to the last day of Moses' life, when the man who had led his people to freedom was taken by God to a mountain-top from which he could see in the distance the land he was not destined to enter. That, said King, was how he felt that night: I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.

That night was the last of his life. The next day he was assassinated. At the end, the still young Christian preacher -- he was not yet forty -- who had led the civil rights movement in the United States, identified not with a Christian figure but with Moses.

In the end the power of Moses' story is precisely that it affirms our mortality. There are many explanations of why Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. I have argued that it was simply because "each generation has its leaders" (Avodah

Zarah 5a) and the person who has the ability to lead a people out of slavery is not necessarily the one who has the requisite skills to lead the next generation into its own and very different challenges. There is no one ideal form of leadership that is right for all times and situations.

Franz Kafka gave voice to a different and no less compelling truth: "He is on the track of Canaan all his life; it is incredible that he should see the land only when on the verge of death. This dying vision of it can only be intended to illustrate how incomplete a moment is human life; incomplete because a life like this could last forever and still be nothing but a moment. Moses fails to enter Canaan not because his life was too short but because it is a human life." (Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1914-1923*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg and Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken, 1965, 195-96.)

What then does the story of Moses tell us? That it is right to fight for justice even against regimes that seem indestructible. That God is with us when we take our stand against oppression. That we must have faith in those we lead, and when we cease to have faith in them we can no longer lead them. That change, though slow, is real, and that people are transformed by high ideals even though it may take centuries.

In one of its most powerful statements about Moses, the Torah states that he was "one hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his strength unabated" (34:8). I used to think that these were merely two sequential phrases, until I realised that the first was the explanation for the second. Why was Moses' strength unabated? Because his eyes were undimmed -- because he never lost the ideals of his youth. Though he sometimes lost faith in himself and his ability to lead, he never lost faith in the cause: in God, service, freedom, the right, the good and the holy. His words at the end of his life were as impassioned as they had been at the beginning.

That is Moses, the man who refused to "go gently into that dark night", the eternal symbol of how a human being, without ever ceasing to be human, can become a giant of the moral life. That is the greatness and the humility of aspiring to be "a servant of God." *Covenant and Conversation 5777 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd [Nehemia] said to them, 'Go, eat delicious foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for [Rosh Hashana] is holy to our Lord. And do not be sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength'" [Neh. 8:10]. Is Rosh Hashana a fundamentally somber day or a festive one? On the one hand, the Bible calls it "Yom T'rua" –

usually translated as the day of the blowing of the shofar. The literal meaning of t'rua is a broken staccato sound, defined as either a three-fold sigh, a nine-fold wail, or a combination of the two [Talmud, Rosh Hashana 33b].

Since Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year, the anniversary of the creation of the world – or more precisely of the creation of the first human being – the t'rua sound expresses an implicit recognition that we live in a world of lamentations, a human predicament in which pain and suffering is real and palpable, where the innocent are killed or their lives forever upended in events such as the recent hurricanes that have ravaged parts of Texas, Florida and the Caribbean. Their collective sob was a t'rua to God.

But if we were to think of the world on Rosh Hashana exclusively in terms of a “long day’s journey into a night of death and despair”, then why the additional appellation, “the day of the birth (or conception) of the world”?

No matter how we translate “HaYom Harat Olam”, the very phrase implies all of the optimism of a new beginning; indeed, it is a declaration that calls to mind all the hope and promise that newborn children bring to the world.

If we regard the world on Rosh Hashana as a newborn creation, dazzling us with its beauty and freshness and innocence, then we have made significant progress in making the ‘new year’ meaningful in our lives. And Rosh Hashana is, after all, considered a festival of joy that cancels any individual mourning and must be celebrated with special food and holiday dress.

So how can we reconcile the tragically sad day of the shofar sigh-sob with the joyously optimistic day of the world’s re-creation?

I believe the answer lies in a second symbol of the shofar, which is also the instrument by which we are asked to coronate God according to a striking Talmudic passage. The Sages quote God as saying: “Recite verses before Me on Rosh Hashana concerning Kingship, Remembrance, and the Shofar! Kingship so that you may coronate Me king over you; Remembrances so that your remembrance may rise favorably before Me; And through what medium? The shofar.” [ibid., 16a].

How is the shofar, which expresses the tragic sigh-sob of a frail human being in an imperfect, incomplete world that often appears to be a vale of tears, also the means by which we coronate God as king?

The answer is that the t'rua broken staccato sound is not the only sound that emerges from the ram horn’s opening. Indeed, the predominant sound is the tekia, which is a straight, uninterrupted and exultant blast – and it is this tekia of affirmation, not the wailing cry of the t'rua, that is central to Rosh Hashana.

Indeed, we are required to sound two t'kiyot blasts for every single t'rua blast! And of the different sounds the shofar makes, the length of the broken sound must be less than that of the straight sound!

Rosh Hashana is indeed the Jewish New Year, anniversary of the birth of humanity, the creation of the world. From that perspective, Rosh Hashana is also the “Day of the T'rua,” the day of the sigh-sob, because we find ourselves in a world of darkness as well as light, of chaos as well as order, of evil as well as goodness, a world in which the Divine Presence is often hidden behind clouds of tragedy and iniquity.

However, the Almighty has also created human beings in His image, and has given us the gift of Torah by which we have the possibility and the power to perfect this imperfect world, to bring light into the places of darkness, to perfect the world in the kingship of God and to make His Presence manifest once again throughout the universe.

This is the majestic and exultant t'kia sound by which we – humans but a little lower than God and crowned with honor and glory – have the mandate to coronate the Almighty. But we can only accomplish that exalted goal by realizing our potential and – through return to God, Torah and Israel – perfecting ourselves and the world.

Ultimately, this is what makes Rosh Hashana a joyous festival. Rosh Hashana is the first of the Ten Days of Teshuva, and so on Rosh Hashana we have the ability – and the challenge – to recreate the world. “Today the world was conceived”; Today, the world can become re-born. ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There are two approaches to understanding much of the prophecy contained in the grand poem of Moshe that constitutes this week’s Torah reading. Rashi in fact develops both themes thoroughly in his commentary. One view is that the Jewish people and their future are the subjects of Moshe’s Divine words.

The difficulties and challenges raised in the verses of this Torah reading are those that the Jewish nation and society will have to overcome in their historic and unprecedented journey in the story of human civilization. Because of the nature of our existence in the world, the Jews are naturally fixated upon their own story and its events, both past and present.

The old maxim that all events and world leaders must be viewed through the lens of, “Is this good for the Jews?” has a great deal of truth attached to it. A basic necessity of Jewish life is knowledge and understanding of our history and our central place in the story of the human race. It is difficult, if not almost impossible, to be a staunch Jew without such knowledge and an identity of individual and national self.

So, the prophecy and vision expressed in the Torah reading must perforce certainly be addressed to the Jewish nation. And that perhaps is one of the main reasons that these written words of the Torah were memorized by generations of Jewish schoolchildren throughout the ages. The message was simply too precious and vital for it somehow to be allowed to be ignored or forgotten.

The alternate interpretation of the prophecy contained in this week's Torah reading is that these words and events refer not to the Jewish people exclusively but rather to the nations of the world generally. As such, all of the strife and violence that so characterizes the human condition will have to be experienced before the world generally comes to its senses and creates a more just and serene society.

The Jewish people will not be passive observers in this process, for they will be greatly affected by the general society as well. But, the heavy lifting, so to speak, is a universal challenge and problem and not an exclusively Jewish issue. This view is certainly reflected in the words and ideas of the Rosh Hashanah prayers, which speak of a universal recognition of the Creator of all and an acceptance of the sovereignty of Heaven.

Jews often feel isolated and even insulated from general world events that surround them. But that is a very dangerous illusion to hold. Though in many ways separated from the world, because of our faith and the demands of our Torah, we are nevertheless part of that universal world.

The balancing act of Jews has always been their attempt to be part of the general society without compromising their uniqueness, faith and Torah observances. That is an important task that the prophetic poem of Haazinu sets before us. It enhances the spirit of this great holy Shabbat of Shuva. ©2017 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

We live in a world where people emphasize history—their past, or the future—their hopes and dreams. Does the present really occur? After anticipating a particular event it passes in an instant and becomes a memory.

Interestingly, in every Shabbat portion read between the Ninth of Av and Yom Kippur, the word Ha-Yom (today) appears. Perhaps the most famous is read on the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashanah—where the Jewish nation is told “You are standing this day (Ha-Yom) all of you before the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 29:9)

Indeed, the Rosh Hashanah service reaches its crescendo as we recite the famous Ha-Yom prayer, which states, “May you strengthen us this day (Ha-Yom), may you bless us this day (Ha-Yom).”

The word Ha-Yom may remind us that sometimes one has the chance to change the world today; but if one misses that chance, the opportunity may be lost forever.

For me, the narrative, which most powerfully teaches this idea, is the binding of Isaac story, which, not coincidentally, is read on Rosh Hashanah. Consider the image of Avraham (Abraham), Yitzhak's (Isaac's) father who was old enough to be his grandfather, taking his son to Moriah. After a three-day trek Avraham binds Yitzhak, lifts his knife and is prepared to slaughter him.

Now consider the second image. An angel of God appears at a distance, intent upon interceding. As I become older, I have started to read this story with a different perspective. Now that I am a father and grandfather, I wonder whether the angel will intervene in time.

When mentioning this to one of my students, she responded, “You've missed the point rebbe—angels always make it on time, people don't.”

No doubt, Ha-Yom teaches that when performing an action we should consider how it is influenced by the past and impacts on the future—merging into the present deed.

No doubt, also, Ha-Yom teaches us to hold on to the good times. Those moments come and go too quickly. But in this season Ha-Yom reminds us of the importance of proper timing. In the words of the rabbis, “Do not say when I have time I will do, lest that time never come.”

What an appropriate message especially on Rosh Hashanah, the day of repentance which emphasizes our being given a second chance. Ha-Yom reminds us that sometimes that is not the case—sometimes and opportunity arises only once — Ha-Yom. ©2017 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI YAAKOV WOLBE

Bais Hamussar

One of the thorniest conundrums of Jewish philosophy is the issue of Divine punishment and how to grapple with bad things happening to good people. The Talmud (Brachos 7a) relates that even Moshe did not initially understand why some tzadikim have it good in this world while others suffer, and why the same applies to the wicked, some prosper and flourish and others don't. While these questions of theodicy and eschatology are difficult and are the subject of much debate and discussion in Jewish

sources, a central aspect of the issue is addressed in the fourth verse of our parsha: "The Rock, perfect are His actions, for all His paths are justice; a trustworthy God without iniquity, righteous and straight is He."

The Talmud (Taanis 11a and partially quoted by Rashi) teaches that this verse is referring to the Almighty's justice with regards to the dispensing of reward and punishment: "A trustworthy God' -- [This teaches that] just as the wicked are punished in Olam Haba (next world) even for a minor sin that they do, so too, the righteous are punished in Olam Hazeh (this world) even for a minor sin that they do. 'Without iniquity' -- [This teaches that] just as the righteous are rewarded in Olam Haba even for a minor mitzvah that they do, so too, the wicked are rewarded in Olam Hazeh even for a minor mitzvah that they do." The Almighty is fair. Tzadikim do not have special treatment and have their sins absolved sans Teshuva or punishment. They too are punished even for minor sins. Same thing for the wicked. A person's aggregate wickedness notwithstanding, the Almighty does not withhold reward for even the most minor mitzvahs. No actions -- not sins for the Tzadik nor mitzvahs for the rasha -- are unaccounted. The only difference between the Tzadik and Rasha is the venue of the reward and punishment: The Tzadik is rewarded in Olam Haba and punished here for whatever few sins he may have committed, while the Rasha is rewarded here for his few mitzvahs and punished in the spiritual world for his sins.

But a question remains. The verse ostensibly states that the Almighty is fair and just and therefore even the wicked are rewarded for their mitzvahs. But in truth it does not seem fair at all. The Mishnah teaches that one iota of reward in Olam Haba outweighs all the rewards and pleasures of Olam Hazeh. Olam Haba pleasures are on a different plane. If you could theoretically encapsulate all of this world's pleasures in a single ingestible pill, it would be insignificant compared to the most minute pleasure of Olam Haba. How then can it be fair and just for discriminating against the Rasha by exhausting his reward on a less meaningful world? Should a tzadik and a rasha perform an identical mitzvah, if it was truly fair their respective rewards would be identical. Yet they are not (the same applies with respect to punishment -- punishment in Olam Haba is harsher than here). Thus the question can be raised anew: How is it fair to have a discrepancy of where reward and punishment are doled out for the Tzadik and rasha?

The answer is that all of that is included in the choices that rendered them Tzadik or Rasha. The Tzadik is someone who prioritizes spiritual matters above physical and material ones. Through his actions, values and behavior, he is demonstrating that he prefers the spiritual world and not the material one. Thus he is choosing to be rewarded in the spiritual

world, and the Almighty is fair and accedes to his choice. By contrast, the rasha is someone who eschews the spiritual world, and lives for this material world alone. He is demonstrating that the world that he values, and the world that he seeks to be rewarded in, it this one, and again the Almighty grants his request and all the rewards for his mitzvahs are paid up here.

Perhaps this idea can be used to explain the Mishnah, "Envy, lust, and honor extract a person from the world." On a basic level the mishnah is teaching that a person who is consumed by envy, lust and honor is precluded from living in our world. But perhaps the world in question is Olam Haba. Envy, lust and pursuit of honor are attributes that demonstrate that a person values pleasure, reward and recognition in this world. By doing these things he is opting to get paid here for his mitzvahs, and like the rasha he will have to forego reward in the spiritual world. The Almighty is fair and just and allows us to choose our preferred venue for reward and punishment.

It would be prudent to choose wisely.

Our choices are not limited to reward and punishment. We determine how our entire relationship with Hashem looks like. We are told that the K'Ruvim ("cherubs") on the Aron ("Ark") were representative of the relationship between the Jewish people and the Almighty. If we turn away from Him, He too will turn away from us. The Talmud (Bava Basra 10a) informs that if we obey His Will, we will be treated like His children.

However, in the unfortunate situation where we disobey Him, then we are demoted to being His subjects who do not benefit from His fatherly love. My grandfather, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe zt"l, would frequently invoke this idea as a central theme of Rosh Hashana: Everyone has a master, the only question is who. Will we choose the "Melech Elyon", the Lofty King of kings, or will we make the poor and fatal decision to follow the "Melech Elyon", the lowly king, the Yetzer Hara, whose sole purpose is to obstruct us from achieving greatness.

May the Almighty help us to always make the right choices. Kesivah VeChasimah Tovah. ©2017 Rabbi Y. Wolbe & aishdas.org

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Hazin Lach

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

This title is not the beginning of a liturgical poem that one might recite, but rather signify the letters that start the various Aliyot in the portion of "H'azinu". The Kohen starts from the "He" of "H'azinu". The second letter appears six sentences later and starts with a "Zayin" signifying the word "Zachor". The third Aliya starts with a "Yud" referencing the word "Yarkivehu". The next Aliya starts with the letter "Vav"

symbolizing "va'yare". The fifth Aliya starts with the letter "lamed" symbolizing the word "Lu". The sixth Aliya starts with the letter "Kaf" referring to the word "ki". This continues to the end of the song and the seventh and last Aliya completes the portion to be read.

The purpose of these exact divisions is not to allow any stops during the song of "Ha'ziunu" except those enumerated above. The only possibility of adding an Aliya is at the end between the seventh Aliya and the end of the portion.

This division is found in the Code of Jewish Law ("Shulchan Aruch 428:5") but there are those sages that divide the contents of the song in a different way, however still maintaining the format of beginning letters that was enumerated above. The *Rambam*, Maimonides, (Laws of Prayer 13:5) states that these intervals represent words that hint at the act of repentance, since this portion is read before Yom kippur and though we generally shy away from beginning or ending an Aliya with words of rebuke, in this case it is acceptable since we are standing at the threshold of seeking repentance. Perhaps as well the words "*Haziv Lach*, indicates that the light (Ziv) and beauty is with the Jewish people at this time since they are actively involved in seeking repentance.

Additionally, there is a difference of opinion amongst our sages if we must retain this division stated when we read the Torah on Monday and Thursday and on Shabbat Mincha. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

There is an age old practice mentioned by Chazal to eat certain foods on the night of Rosh Hashannah.

These are known as simanim -- signs that we pray will symbolize a good year. Short tefillos accompany the simanim and the poskim comment that the intent and thoughts of teshuva that occur at this time can help make the simanim a reality. Perhaps the most popular of the simanim is the custom to partake of an apple dipped in honey. At this time, we fervently beseech Hashem for a shana tova u'mesukah, a good and sweet year. By analyzing what this dual request of "good and sweet" represents, we can gain a greater appreciation of what to concentrate our thoughts on at this opportune moments.

Chazal teach us that when events occur that are especially good, we are required to recite the bracha of Hatov V'hameitiv -- Hashem is good, and Does good. There is another bracha that is recited when something bad happens, the bracha of Dayan Ha'Emes -- Hashem is the true judge. These different berachos are only recited in this world; in the world to come, only the bracha on good will be recited. The future is described as a day that is only good. Creation was originally supposed to be this way. When Hashem

began the creation of the world with the creation of light, the Torah tells us that the light was good. Unfortunately for us, this light could not be retained in this world and Hashem hid it away for the righteous for days to come. When we ask Hashem for a shana tova, we are not just asking for good things in this world. We are elevating our thoughts by beseeching Hashem for a world that is all good. We are dreaming about a world in which the original light of Creation of Hashem's presence is discernible.

In addition to a good year, we also ask for a sweet one. They words of Torah are compared to gold and honey. "More precious than gold and sweeter than honey" is Dovid HaMelech 's description of Hashem's words. What is the significance of comparing the Torah to honey if it is already comparable to gold? Isn't gold obviously more valuable than honey? Gold and honey are fundamentally different from one another. Although gold is more valuable, it is only significant because of what it can purchase. It does not provide actual pleasure, but rather it enables one to purchase worldly pleasures. Honey, although not particularly expensive, is intrinsically enjoyable. The words of Torah are compared to both gold and honey. Torah is like spiritual gold in that the acquisition of Torah knowledge enables one to better perform Mitzvos, and Torah study helps perfect a person's character traits. Like gold, it is valuable for what it can accomplish. However, Torah is also much more than spiritual gold, because the words of Torah are sweeter than honey. Even without any other advantages gained by Torah study, learning Torah is the sweetest gift Hashem has given us. It is both more precious than gold and simultaneously sweeter than honey.

The Ohr HaChaim has a remarkable comment (Devarim 26:11) wherein he describes how we would react to the goodness and sweetness of Torah if we truly appreciated it to the fullest. We would be so overwhelmed by the sweet taste of Torah that we wouldn't be able to pursue anything else. As we dip our apple in our honey on Rosh Hashanah, we should be focusing on the lofty dreams of having a good and sweet year. We beseech Hashem to see His light and taste His Torah. May this year be a year of only goodness and sweetness for all of Klal Yisroel. ©2017 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & TorahWeb.org

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Drasha

With the Rosh Hashana calendar this year causing me to write this and send it to you prior to the end of 5777, we take this moment to thank Hashem for allowing us another year of Torah learning and teaching some of the many ideas which are found in His Torah. I am always amazed that there is always something new to be found, something new to be studied, and some new insight that we had not

previously explored. We are grateful to Hashem for another year of opportunities and knowledge. Please note that in spite of the fact that I am sending this to you prior to the end of 5777, it will already be 5778 when this *parasha* is read.

Moshe begins Ha'azinu with a song or poem to the B'nei Yisrael. In this song, Moshe is extremely critical of the people and repeats to the nation the prediction of their turning from Hashem and His punishment of exile from His land. Now when Moshe completes this poem, he calls on Yehoshua to join him in teaching the poem to the people so that they will remember every word. "*Vayavo Moshe vayidaber et kol divrei hashirah hazot b'aznei ha'am hu v'Hoshei'a bin Nun*, and Moshe came and spoke all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea bin Nun. *Vay'chal Moshe l'daber et kol had'varim ha'eileh el kol Yisrael*, Moshe concluded speaking all these words to all of Israel. *Vayomer aleihem simu l'vav'chem l'chol had'varim asher anochi mei'id bachem hayom asher t'tzavum et B'nei Yisrael et b'neichem lishmor la'asot et kol divrei haTorah hazot*, and he said to them, 'apply your heart to all the words that I testify against you today, which you are to instruct your children to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah. *Ki lo davar reik hu mikem ki hu chayeichem uvadavar hazeh ta'arichu yamim al ha'adamah asher atem ovrin et haYarden shamah l'rishtah*, for it is not an empty thing from you, for it is your life and through this matter shall you prolong your days in the land to which you cross the Jordan to take possession of it."

Our Rabbis point out that there is a striking problem in the first *pasuk*. We saw in Vayikra (13:16) that Moshe had changed Hoshea's name to Yehoshua (Joshua) before sending him together as part of the twelve spies who came into the land and returned after forty days with a negative report. Only two of the twelve spies issued a very positive report about the land and were rewarded with being able to enter the land while the other spies all died. The negative report had resulted in the forty years in the desert which was ending on this next day. Our Rabbis posit reasons why Yehoshua's name was changed at this point only to return to this form from that time onward.

Rashi explains this change as part of the transition of leadership from Moshe to Yehoshua. Moshe wished to show the people that Yehoshua was a qualified replacement for Moshe by giving him a *meturgiman* (spokesman) as a sign of leadership while Moshe was still alive. This act told the people that Yehoshua was a genuine leader and did not rise to power only after the death of Moshe. Rashi goes on to explain that Yehoshua was the one who chose to lower his glory at this time even though greatness had been given to him. This was a sign of Yehoshua's humility. The Or HaChaim explains that the letter *yud* had been added to Hoshea's name as a sign of Hashem's love

for Yehoshua and of his greatness. The Or HaChaim explains that even though Yehoshua was raised up now, only Moshe spoke to the people and Hashem only spoke with Moshe this last time. He attributes the change in Yehoshua's name now to the placing of Moshe and Yehoshua on the same level in the *pasuk*. When Yehoshua is compared directly with Moshe, he is seen as the lesser of the two. The Kli Yakar places the decision for the change in name here to Moshe's original change. Moshe changed Hoshea's name to give him strength and encouragement during the episode of the spies. As long as even one of that generation was still alive, he was called Yehoshua. All the rest of that generation was now gone except for Moshe, but Moshe was now in the final minutes of his life. Yehoshua's name became Hoshea again this one time with Moshe, only to return to Yehoshua to give him that same strength and encouragement now as he embarked on the leadership of the people in the conquering of the land.

The B'nei Yisrael are cautioned to take these words of this song to heart. There are two basic purposes that are stated here for this serious approach to this song. The first is stated together with the command to understand this poem: "*Vayomer aleihem simu l'vav'chem l'chol had'varim asher anochi mei'id bachem hayom asher t'tzavum et B'nei Yisrael et b'neichem lishmor la'asot et kol divrei haTorah hazot*, and he said to them, 'apply your heart to all the words that I testify against you today, which you are to instruct your children to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.'" The B'nei Yisrael would no longer hear directly from Moshe as Moshe's task of giving over the Torah was now completed. Now it would be the responsibility of the next generations to continue the study of Torah and the traditions and pass these laws on to the next generation. Rashi explains that a person must concentrate his eyes, ears, and heart and direct them to the study of Torah. The Sifri compares this statement to Yechezkeil (Ezekiel)'s vision of the future Temple. Yechezkeil tells the people to direct their eyes, ears, and hearts to this image of the future Temple. If Yechezkeil could say this about the Temple, how much more so should one concentrate on the entire Torah and its Laws.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, the Aznayim L'Torah, explains that the study of Torah is the source of life itself. Torah is what gives meaning to life. Our days on earth are numbered, yet it is not whether we have lived seventy or eighty years that is the mark of our lives, but whether we have had seventy or eighty years of life. That can only come when one has sought meaning in one's life through the study and practice of Torah. When one does even a simple act yet realizes that this is one of the reasons Hashem has placed us on this earth, he elevates that simple action into one that has meaning for his life and the lives of others. HaRav

Sorotzkin is clear that the study of Torah must be accompanied by the practice of those lessons in real life together with the understanding that those actions are part of our service to Hashem and His Torah.

"*Vayomer aleihem simu l'vav'chem l'chol had'varim asher anochi mei'id bachem hayom asher t'tzavum et B'nei Yisrael et b'neichem lishmor la'asot et kol divrei haTorah hazot*, and he said to them, 'apply your heart to all the words that I testify against you today, which you are to instruct your children to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.'" The Torah is not an empty document as I hope we have learned over this last year through the many lessons which I have tried to present to you each week. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that we can learn the meaning of this statement from the lives of Sarah and Avraham. When the Torah describes the death of each, it breaks up their lives as one hundred years and twenty years and seven years, rather than saying one hundred twenty-seven years. This comes to teach us that each year of their lives were years of "living". Each day was total because each day was "lived" in the service of Hashem. This does not mean that Avraham and Sarah sat and learned Torah all day. (Though the Torah had not as yet been given, many laws are part of the extension of the Seven Laws of the Sons of Noah or part of a logical mind's understanding of how people should act towards each other and towards their Maker). Avraham and Sarah "lived" their lives by their actions towards everyone and Hashem. The Torah is clear about this, showing Avraham and Sarah's hospitality, care, thoughtfulness, and honor to others while at the same time teaching others about monotheism and thanking Hashem at every opportunity. The ibn Ezra adds to this that the study of Torah and our actions in *yir'at Hashem*, the fear of Hashem, lengthen our days and give us life in Israel and not in exile.

The Baal HaTurim compares the use of the word "*reik*, empty" here with its usage in the phrase "*v'habor reik ein bo mayim*, and the pit was empty, there was no water in it." The rest of the phrase indicates that the pit was not empty, instead it was empty only of water but that there were scorpions, snakes, and other deadly creatures in it. HaRav

Shamshon

Raphael

Hirsch

explains that *reik* is often used to mean empty of. Hirsch translates "*ki lo davar reik hu mikem*" as "for it is



not a word empty of you." The speech which Moshe has just given the people in the form of a song or poem is not empty of you, "which does not concern your whole existence and purposes." Hirsch continues, "No single word of the Torah is indifferent to you. In every one you can find important truths which have a bearing on your whole life."

We have spent this past year examining the weekly *parasha* for words, phrases, and sentences in which we hope to find meaning for our lives. For those who have been with me from the beginning, this marks the end of five years of intensive study and searching for answers to our questions. Each year has seen a different section taken from the *parasha* and new lessons learned, some of which I personally have discovered for myself within this process. We have barely begun to touch the surface of the myriad lessons and ideas which we can discover. There are some *parshiot* that I have taught for forty-seven years, yet each time I have discovered new ideas only because I put myself into the discussion as it unfolds. These lessons which I have been fortunate to explore with you are as much for my benefit as for yours. During this next year I have decided to work on revising much of what I have written in the hopes of producing a more palatable form for a book. I will continue to share these with you as each week progresses. I wish to take this opportunity to wish each of you a *Shanah Tova U'm'tukah*, a good and sweet year. For my Sephardic friends, I wish you *Tizku L'Shanim Rabot*, may you be worthy of many years, and *Tizku V'Tichyu V'Ta'arichu Yamim*, may you be worthy and may you live and lengthen your days. And may I add to both blessings, may you continue to dwell in the Torah and may the Torah continue to dwell in you. ©2017 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Ha'azinu is the third time that Moshe admonishes the Jews. The other accounts in the Torah (Bechukotai and Ki Tavo) explain what will happen if we kept the Torah, and what would happen if we didn't. What's left to reproof?

Commentaries explain that here we are being told something very different: Think. Contemplate. Weigh. Decide. No ultimatums. No threats. You think it through and decide what makes the most sense. What's the best thing for you to do? How will you gain the most? Just as G-d then shows Moshe the land he yearned to reach, Moshe shows us the people we should yearn to be! That is who we are, and what truly defines us. Decide to take the steps to return there. No threats-just decisions. We would be wise to carry over this Parsha's lessons into the character of the Yom Kippur that follows, and into the character of the people we should yearn to be! ©2002 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed Inc.