

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

In majestic language, Moses breaks into song, investing his final testament to the Israelites with all the power and passion at his command. He begins dramatically but gently, calling heaven and earth to witness what he is about to say, sounding ironically very much like "The quality of mercy is not strained", Portia's speech in *The Merchant of Venice*.

"Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; / Hear, you earth, the words of my mouth. / Let my teaching fall like rain / and my words descend like dew, / like showers on new grass, / like abundant rain on tender plants." (Deut. 32:1-2)

But this is a mere prelude to the core message Moses wants to convey. It is the idea known as *tzidduk ha-din*, vindicating G-d's justice. The way Moses puts it is this: "He is the Rock, His works are perfect, / And all His ways are just. / A faithful G-d who does no wrong, / Upright and just is He." (Deut. 32:4)

This is a doctrine fundamental to Judaism and its understanding of evil and suffering in the world -- a difficult but necessary doctrine. G-d is just. Why then do bad things happen?

"Is He corrupt? No -- the defect is in His children, / a crooked and perverse generation." (Deut. 32:5)

G-d requites good with good, evil with evil. When bad things happen to us it is because we have been guilty of doing bad things ourselves. The fault lies not in our stars but ourselves.

Moving into the prophetic mode, Moses foresees what he has already predicted, even before they have crossed the Jordan and entered the land. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy he has been warning of the danger that in their land, once the hardships of the desert and the struggles of battle have been forgotten, the people will become comfortable and complacent. They will attribute their achievements to themselves and they will drift from their faith. When this happens they will bring disaster on themselves: "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked -- / You became fat, thick, gross -- / They abandoned the G-d who made them / and scorned the Rock their Savior... / You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; / And forgot the G-d who gave you birth." (Deut. 32: 15-18)

This, the first use of the word *Yeshurun* in the

Torah -- from the root *Yashar*, upright -- is deliberately ironic. Israel once knew what it was to be upright, but it will be led astray by a combination of affluence, security and assimilation to the ways of its neighbours. It will betray the terms of the covenant, and when that happens it will find that G-d is no longer with it. It will discover that history is a ravaging wolf. Separated from the source of its strength, it will be overpowered by its enemies. All that the nation once enjoyed will be lost. It is a stark and terrifying message.

Yet Moses is here bringing the Torah to a close with a theme that has been there from the beginning. G-d, creator of the universe, made a world that is fundamentally good: the word that echoes seven times in the first chapter of Genesis. It is humans, granted freewill as G-d's image and likeness, who introduce evil into the world, and then suffer its consequences. Hence Moses' insistence that when trouble and tragedy appear, we should search for the cause within ourselves, and not blame G-d. G-d is upright and just. The defect is in us, His children.

This is perhaps the most difficult idea in the whole of Judaism. It is open to the simplest of objections, one that has sounded in almost every generation. If G-d is just, why do bad things happen to good people? This is the question asked not by skeptics, doubters, but by the very heroes of faith. We hear it in Abraham's plea, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" We hear it in Moses' challenge, "Why have you done evil to this people?" It sounds again in Jeremiah: "Lord, you are always right when I dispute with You. Yet I must plead my case before You: Why are the wicked so prosperous? Why are evil people so happy?" (Jer. 12:1).

It is an argument that never ceased. It continued through the rabbinic literature. It was heard again in the *kinot*, the laments, prompted by the persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages. It sounds in the literature produced in the wake of the Spanish expulsion, and echoes still when we recall the Holocaust.

The Talmud says that of all the questions Moses asked G-d, this was the one to which G-d did not give an answer. (*Berakhot 7a*) The simplest, deepest interpretation is given in Psalm 92, "The song of the Sabbath day." Though "the wicked spring up like grass," they will eventually be destroyed. The righteous, by contrast, "flourish like a palm tree and grow tall like a

cedar in Lebanon." Evil wins in the short term but never in the long. The wicked are like grass, the righteous like a tree. Grass grows overnight but it takes years for a tree to reach its full height. In the long run, tyrannies are defeated. Empires decline and fall. Goodness and rightness win the final battle. As Martin Luther King said in the spirit of the Psalm: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

It is a difficult belief, this commitment to seeing justice in history under the sovereignty of G-d. Yet consider the alternatives. They are three. The first is to say that there is no meaning in history whatsoever. *Homo hominis lupus est*, "Man is wolf to man". As Thucydides said in the name of the Athenians: "The strong do as they want, the weak suffer what they must." History is a Darwinian struggle to survive, and justice is no more than the name given to the will of the stronger party.

The second, about which I write in my new book *Not In G-d's Name*, is dualism, the idea that evil comes not from G-d but from an independent force: Satan, the Devil, the Antichrist, Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, and the many other names given to the force that is not G-d but is opposed to Him and those who worship Him. This idea, which has surfaced in sectarian forms in each of the Abrahamic monotheisms, as well as in modern, secular totalitarianisms, is one of the most dangerous in all of history. It divides humanity into the unshakeably good and the irredeemably evil, giving rise to a long history of bloodshed and barbarism of the kind we see being enacted today in many parts of the world in the name of holy war against the greater and lesser Satan. This is dualism, not monotheism, and the sages, who called it *shei reshuyot*, "two powers or domains" (Berakhot 33b), were right to reject it utterly.

The third, debated extensively in the rabbinic literature, is to say that justice ultimately exists in the world to come, in life after death. Yet though this is an essential element of Judaism, it is striking how relatively little Judaism had recourse to it, recognizing that the central thrust of Tanakh is on this world, and life before death. For it is here that we must work for justice, fairness, compassion, decency, the alleviation of poverty, and the perfection, as far as lies within our power, of society and our individual lives. Tanakh almost never takes this option. G-d does not say to Jeremiah or Job that the answer to their question exists in heaven and they will see it as soon as they end their stay on earth. The passion for justice so characteristic of Judaism would dissipate entirely were this the only answer.

Difficult though Jewish faith is, it has had the effect through history of leading us to say: if bad things have happened, let us blame no one but ourselves, and let us labour to make them better. It was this that led Jews, time and again, to emerge from tragedy, shaken, scarred, limping like Jacob after his encounter with the

angel, yet resolved to begin again, to rededicate ourselves to our mission and faith, to ascribe our achievements to G-d and our defeats to ourselves.

Out of such humility, a momentous strength is born. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

"**H**ear [ha'azinu], O heavens, and I will speak, and may the earth listen [tishma] to the words of my mouth" (Deuteronomy 32:1). So begins the song of Moses just prior to his death.

Hearing and listening are not the same. Hearing is external, superficial, and simple; all one does is take in the physical sound. Listening is more complex. It is internal, requiring full concentration to deeply absorb and integrate the words being said.

The challenge to understand *tishma* as "listen" is one that I have often shared over the years. In this process, I didn't pay much attention to *ha'azinu* (from the word *ozen* [ear]) as hearing. I viewed it as a natural phenomenon, a mundane activity that requires little or no effort.

No more. Things for me have now changed, as I have lost significant hearing in my left ear. I am not alone. Loss of hearing is now commonplace. Nearly 25 percent of those aged sixty-five to seventy-four and 50 percent of those seventy-five and older are hearing impaired.

For me, and I'm sure for others, loss of hearing has serious consequences, as I've come to recognize that I often look lost. When people speak to me, especially in a crowd, I cannot hear. Often I respond to a question with an answer that has nothing to do with the issue presented. At other times, when I do not respond, people may feel I'm upset with them. It is not uncommon for me to feel shut out; the world before me seems to pass me by. Even when I'm in a room with others, I feel almost as if I were somewhere else.

Thankfully, *halachah* is welcoming to the hearing impaired. And so those who hear the shofar or the Book of Esther through a hearing aid are considered to be actually hearing. The aid is not viewed as an impediment to fulfilling the *mitzvah*.

My hope is that *halachah* will reach even further and that the definition of hearing will be expanded. In its broadest sense, hearing in *halachah* should be understood as any form of reception. This would include receiving sounds through reading lips or sign language or viewing words on a screen as they are being voiced or even seeing and experiencing the emotion of the moment.

When Paul Simon wrote "The Sound of Silence," he seemed to be speaking about the

importance not only of hearing but of listening. But for me, these days, “The Sound of Silence” has a different meaning. It refers to sounds that I know are being made but that I cannot hear. They are, literally, sounds of silence.

Fulfilling *v'tishma* (listen) as mentioned in the last song of Moses is only part of the story. *Ha'azinu* (hearing) should never be taken for granted; its miracle should always be appreciated and celebrated. ©2022 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 BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

The special nature and all of the events of Jewish history are outlined for us in this week's parsha. Ramban in the 13th century comments that anyone who can, so many centuries earlier, accurately foretell the later fate of a people is an exceptional prophet. Moshe certainly fits that description and test. And what more can we add to this phenomenon, now seven hundred-fifty years after Ramban!

The rabbis of the Talmud attributed the crown of wisdom to the one who has a vision of the future. Even though Moshe is the greatest of all prophets, his title amongst the Jewish people is Moshe the teacher, indicating his wisdom and knowledge are translated into his ability to view the future.

Moshe lays down the basic pattern of all of Jewish history – the struggle to remain Jewish and not succumb to the blandishments of current cultures and beliefs, the illogical and almost pathological enmity of the world to Judaism and the Jewish people, the awful price paid by Jews throughout history and the eventual realization of Jews, and the non-Jewish world as well, of God's guidance in history and human life.

This entire, very complex story is foretold to us in this week's most remarkable parsha. It is no wonder that Jewish tradition dictated that Jewish children should commit this parsha to memory, for within it is recorded the entire essence of Jewish history.

Though we never really know the exact details of the future of the Jewish people, the broad outlines of the story have been known to us for millennia. Just read and study the words of this parsha.

Moshe establishes heaven and earth as witnesses to the covenant and the historical fate of the Jewish people. Rashi explains that not only are they honest and objective witnesses but most importantly they are eternal witnesses. Human witnesses are mortal and passing. Later generations cannot hear their testimony, and even though current video technology attempts to correct this deficiency, much of the personal nuance and force, which colors all human testimony, is lost.

So we rely on heaven and earth to reinforce our belief and commitment to the eternal covenant. It is the very wonders and mysteries of nature itself that point to the Creator. And it is all of human history that rises to testify as to the uniqueness of the Jewish story and the special role that the Jewish people played and continue to play in human events.

The witness testimony of heaven is found in the wonders of the natural world. The witness testimony of earth is found in the history of humankind and of the role of the Jewish people in that amazing, exhilarating and yet depressing story. Moshe begs of us to listen to these two witnesses for it is within their and our ability to know our past and future through their testimony.

Much of their testimony is frightening and worrisome but it is even more frightening to be unaware of our past and future. We should listen carefully to the parsha. It has much to teach us about our world and ourselves. ©2022 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### Haziv Lach

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

No, this title is not the beginning of a liturgical poem recited on Shabbat Shuvah (the Shabbat before Yom Kippur). In fact, *Haziv Lach* is an acronym that tells us where to start each *aliyah* of Parshat Ha'azinu.

The *Kohen aliyah* starts from the letter *Heh* of the word “*ha'azinu*” and is 6 verses. The *Levi aliyah* starts from the *Zayin* of “*zechor*” and is six verses. The third *aliyah* starts with the *Yud* of “*yarkivehu*” and is five verses. The next *aliyah* starts with the *Vav* of “*va-yar*” and is ten verses. The fifth *aliyah* starts with the letter *Lamed* of the word “*lu*” and is 11 verses. The sixth *aliyah* starts with the letter *Kaf* of “*ki esa*” and is four verses, which takes us to the end of the poem. The seventh and final *aliyah* is nine verses and ends the *parsha*.

This division is codified in *Shulchan Aruch* 428:5. (There is an alternate division of Ha'azinu, which still follows the acronym of *Haziv Lach*.) Thus, we cannot readily add *aliyot* or divide the *parsha* differently. The most we can do is split the final *aliyah*.

The Rambam states that the reason to divide the *parsha* according to *Haziv Lach* is to rebuke the people so that they will repent (*Hilchot Tefillah* 13:5). It's not clear what he means, since all of Ha'azinu is about rebuke. Some explain that what the Rambam has in mind is the rule that we follow the rest of the year, namely to avoid beginning or ending an *aliyah* with words of rebuke. The custom of *Haziv Lach* does exactly what we usually avoid! The Rambam is

justifying the custom by saying that it may bring about repentance on Shabbat Shuvah, which is focused on repenting. Alternatively, perhaps it is thinking about the acronym of *Haziv Lach* that can help bring about repentance. For the phrase itself means “Glory (*ziv*) is yours (*lach*),” a reminder that we have great potential to repent.

If this second reason is correct, perhaps it is necessary to follow the division only on Shabbat Shuvah itself (when we read the entire *parsha* and the entire acronym is spelled out), but not at the shorter Torah readings beforehand (on Monday, Thursday, and the previous Shabbat Mincha). This is a subject of disagreement among the *poskim*. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**W**hy must Sukkot occur in such close proximity to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur? A fresh analysis of a famous dispute in the Talmud regarding precisely what it is that the sukkah commemorates yields a fascinating answer to this question.

Rabbi Akiva (Tractate Sukkah 11b) maintains that we are replicating the actual booths in which our ancestors dwelt during their desert wanderings, while Rabbi Eliezer believes that we are re-creating the miraculous “clouds of glory” which descended from the Almighty as an ethereal protective shield when they left Egypt.

Since our tradition records that the final judgment and absolution of God during this period of repentance is rendered on the seventh day of Sukkot (Hoshana Rabba), it is clear that the Sukkah is an intrinsic part of a process of repentance that began with Rosh Hashana.

Hence, even when R. Eliezer and R. Akiva disagree as to the identity of the “booths” themselves, perhaps they are also distinguishing between two different aspects of the repentance process.

Indeed, the Holy Zohar speaks of two forms of repentance: a lower repentance (*teshuva tata'a*) which is for a specific transgression or group of transgressions, and a higher repentance (*teshuva ila'a*) which is an uplifting of the entire personality, a total ennobling of one's direction in life.

I would suggest that R. Akiva's sukkah, reminiscent of the flimsy desert structures, is linked to the lower form of repentance, and R. Eliezer's “clouds of glory” sukkah is linked to the higher form of repentance. Ultimately, we need both of them!

Maimonides, in fact, supports this hypothesis in his Laws of Repentance. Initially, he describes the penitent as having to experience a humbling process: “The path of repentance is for the penitent to cry out constantly before God with tears and beseeching. He

gives charity according to his ability, distancing himself from what he did, and he changes his name as if to say that he is not the same person who committed these transgressions, transforming his deeds into righteous deeds. He exiles himself from his place, because exile serves as a forgiveness for sin in that it causes a person to become more subdued, humble and subservient” (Hilchot Teshuva 2:4).

Here we see an implicit connection between the last step in the repentance process and the sukkah. Since no one understands the humbling experience better than a person who has fallen so low that he must leave his accustomed abode and no longer has a permanent roof over his head, the sukkah becomes in actuality the final step in Maimonides' vision of repentance.

And the entire desert experience, with the Israelite wanderings from place to place, has served as the historical paradigm of Jewish exile, according to most biblical interpretations, with the sukkah standing out as the ultimate personalized symbol of this exile.

Yet, several chapters ahead, Maimonides codifies a different kind of repentance, a state of perfection that places the penitent close to the Divine Presence: “Repentance is on the highest level because it brings a person close to the Divine Presence. Yesterday he was hated by God and alienated and abominable. But today he is beloved, delightful, close, a beloved friend” (ibid, 7:6).

A friend of God! The highest achievement of repentance. What do friends do? One way to express delight and closeness with a beloved friend is to invite him into your home. And in a sense, this is what happens on Sukkot.

During Yom Kippur, we were all in the presence of God (*lifnei Hashem*) like angels in heaven. But on Sukkot, which arrives just days afterward, our presence before God is extended by His making our home and His home the very same home. All through the months of Elul and Tishrei, we add the 27th Psalm to the prayer service, which includes the following verse: “One thing have I desired of the Lord ...that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life...” Psalms 27:1).

Finally, on Sukkot our desires are answered. In effect, God is the bridegroom, and we, the Jewish people, are the bride called upon to enter the bridegroom's home. The seven days we sit inside the sukkah correspond to the seven days that a marriage is celebrated. Since no ‘*Sheva Brachot*’ is complete without new faces at each of the seven festive meals, we also invite into our sukkah new faces for the duration of the seven days: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David, and the custom is called *ushpizin*.

Perhaps we must first seek forgiveness for our individual transgressions and lovingly accept the exile

of the sukkah of R. Akiva before we can enter the marriage chamber of the glorious sukkah of R. Eliezer. How fortunate are we that the one naturally turns into the other as we reach upwards in our relationship to the Divine. © 2022 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## Poetic Layers

**T**he poem, which begins parashat Ha'azinu, speaks of the B'nei Yisrael not appreciating all that Hashem has done for them. It was Moshe's final message and warning to the people before his death. Moshe called on the people to remember their special relationship with Hashem as their Father. He reminded the people to emulate Hashem, Who has no corruption. Moshe also reminded the people that the study of Torah will lead to the performance of Hashem's mitzvot and to the understanding of the Torah's messages.

The Torah states: "Give ear, O Heavens, and I will speak; and may the earth hear the words of my mouth. May my teaching drop like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew; like storm winds upon vegetation, and like raindrops upon blades of grass. When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our Elokim. The Rock – perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice; a Keil of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He. Corruption is not His – the blemish is His children's, a perverse and twisted generation. Is it to Hashem that you do this, O vile and unwise people? Is He not your Father, your Master? Has He not created you and firmed you? Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. Ask your father and he will relate it to you, and your elders and they will tell you."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that poetry was the best form for Moshe's message to the people. Poetry can be understood on many different levels, while at the same time it is easier to learn and store in one's long-term memory for continual analysis enabled by one's maturity and knowledge. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that this Poem speaks of the Heavens and the Earth, yet the meaning of Heaven and Earth may be understood differently by different people. He offers one such example: if the great scholars (the Heavens) come to listen to the rebuke and warnings from their Teacher (Moshe), then also the Common Man (the Earth) will hear and pay attention. The word "daber, speak" is used for the Heavens, and the word "amar, say" is used for the Earth. Those who are more learned and holy (the Heavens) can "listen intently" to the difficult "speech" of the rebuke, while it is sufficient that the Common Man, who is not so learned or holy, "hear" the softer "words of my mouth."

The Torah uses the word "likchi, my taking" to mean "my teachings". Ibn Ezra explains that "this word is used to refer to teaching because the subject matter is meant to be taken by the student from the teacher."

The teachings are the mitzvot given to Moshe from Hashem. They are described as "rain" and "dew." The word, "araf, a heavy pouring" is used with "matar, rain," and the word "tizal, a light falling" is used with "tal, dew." Sforno explains that, for learned people, the rain (Torah) is pelting and penetrating in its message, like heavy rains, "storm winds upon vegetation," which are good for the trees. For the average person, the Torah can still nourish him as the dew covers and nourishes the shorter vegetation, "like raindrops upon blades of grass."

The Or HaChaim asks six grammatical questions about the first sentence of our Poem. Several of these questions have already been addressed, but the nuances of his questions and his answers are from a unique perspective. The Or HaChaim asks why the word "ha'azinu, give ear to" is used by the Heavens, yet the word "shema, hear" is used by the Earth. He explains that Moshe was closer to the Heavens and used the stronger form, "ha'azinu", whereas Isaiah, who was farther from the Heavens, used the softer form, "shim'u" when referring to the Heavens. The Or HaChaim also explains that, because we say that there are seventy faces to the Torah (namely, that one can offer different and even contradictory explanations that can both be correct on a different level), Moshe calls on the Heavens to "give ear" because of their distance from him, whereas he only asks the Earth to listen since it is close and will not have to strain to hear. We find, however, that Isaiah uses "shim'u" to refer to the Heavens and "ha'azinu" to refer to the Earth. The Or HaChaim explains this contradiction by changing the speaker. Since Hashem can be viewed as the speaker, the Heavens are close to Him and they do not need to strain to listen, yet the Earth is distant from Hashem and needs to listen more carefully.

Rashi reminds us that the Heavens and the Earth are witnesses to the covenant between Hashem and the B'nei Yisrael as per Hashem's instruction in last week's parasha, Vayeilech. They were chosen because of their eternal quality; the Heavens and the Earth will continue to exist through all generations. In addition, we can know that the Heavens and the Earth monitor Man's actions because they give forth and hold back their rewards based on Man's adherence to Hashem's laws. This "promise" is recited twice daily in the words of the Shema.

The Kli Yakar has a different approach. He explains that the Heavens and the Earth are not inherently eternal, as they are dependent on the existence of the Torah. Basing his comments on the Midrash which says that in the Creation of the World, the Torah says "the sixth day", a reference to the sixth of Sivan, the day on which the B'nei Yisrael received the Torah, the Kli Yakar explains that the fact that the Heavens and the Earth do exist, is the proof of the

covenant that Hashem established. In their very existence, they give testimony to that covenant.

We have seen, through the different commentators, that there are many different ways to understand the few words of the Torah which we have chosen to study. Each approach of the different Rabbis has placed his own individual mark on our understanding of these p'sukim. That is why HaRav Sorotzkin says that poetry or song is the best form of this message. We know that poetry is understood on many levels from many approaches. Each has its own validity, yet each speaks to a person from its own perspective. The Torah is precisely that kind of poetry. The more that one studies Torah, the more one can comprehend its depth. But Torah goes beyond Poetry. Poetry is limited by the ability of a poet to express himself through his choice of words. Hashem has shown the world that He was able to create the Torah by limiting His words while increasing the layers of its message.

May we continue to study Torah each week, and as we study, may we increasingly sense the power of its many intricate messages. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

**RABBI AVI SHAFRAN**

## The Secret, Unveiled

**A**lthough I appreciate most humor, even jokes about Jews, I have always found comedian Alan King's wry summary of Jewish holidays, "They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat!" profoundly unfunny.

Not that we Jews don't deserve a bit of mockery for our... enthusiasm... regarding things culinary. But the "They tried to kill us" introduction is too painfully true to be even part of a bon mot. Whether the "they" tried to kill us spiritually or physically, from ancient times in Egypt and Babylonia and Persia and Greece and the Roman Empire and the Crusades to more recent history including the Holocaust and Soviet Communism, there have been just so many they's.

Mark Twain famously observed in 1898 -- even before the the USSR and the Holocaust -- that "Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of...

"He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished.

"The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive

mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

The secret is Hashem, of course, and the merit of our forefathers. And our eternal survival is encapsulated in the parsha, in the words "I will exhaust my arrows" (Devarim 32:23). Which the Midrash, cited by Rashi, expands upon: "My arrows will come to an end but they [Klal Yisrael] will not." ©2022 Rabbi A. Shafran and Ami Magazine

**RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

## Migdal Ohr

**"F**or the L-rd's portion is His nation; Jacob, the rope of His allotment." (Devarim 32:8) While some meforshim explain the word 'chevel' as "portion," others utilize the "rope" meaning to explain the relationship of Yaakov (representing the Jewish People) and Hashem. Just as a rope is made of multiple strands woven together, Yaakov had the merit of his grandfather Avraham, his father Yitzchak, and his own merit. Some explain the rope metaphor to refer to the means of drawing something close. Just as a boat is pulled into the dock with mooring ropes, Hashem holds onto "Yaakov" and draws the Jewish People closer to Him. In that case, the name Yaakov conveys a key message.

When Yaakov fought the Angel of Esav and won, he was given the name Yisrael, indicating that he had bested angels and men. That was to become his new name. However, the name Yaakov never went away entirely. There are various explanations: 1. Yaakov represents subservience, and Yisrael represents victory. (Rashi) 2. Yaakov represents the individual, Yisrael, the national identity. (Meshech Chochma) 3. Yisrael is supernatural, while Yaakov is mundane. (Netziv)

By saying Yaakov is the rope Hashem uses to pull His nation towards Him, we learn it isn't only the greatest leaders Hashem reaches for. Rather, he grasps hold of the average person, even if he is lowly and oppressed, because he has the ability to be holy and bring his entire nation up with him. What a fantastic way to look at ourselves and the potential of the year ahead!

*On the last Yom Kippur of his life, the Gaon, R' Yehudah Leib Chasman, z"l, mashgiach of Yeshivas Chevron, returned to his house after neilah, due to his weakness from the fast. A minyan of bochorim accompanied him. R' Chasman's face shone with happiness that he was zocheh to complete the fast. As the bochorim sat down to await the time to daven Maariv, R' Chasman said, "Yona Hanavi told the men on the ship to 'lift me and throw me into the sea.' The words 'lift me' seems to be extra. What was Yona adding with these words? Wouldn't it have been enough if he said only, 'Throw me into the sea'?"*

*"The answer is that Yona was requesting they delay throwing him into the sea as much as possible – even for a split second, because there is nothing more valuable in the world than the life of a human being. Even when death has already been decreed, it's still worthwhile to lengthen one's life as much as possible. Who knows how much a person may achieve in his last moments?!"*

*The mashgiach concluded, "We have to understand that we now still have another moment of kedushas Yom Kippur! Come, let us grab hold of it; do not weaken! Let us not lose this precious gem without a thought!" © 2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

### **RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## **Perceptions**

If you are reading this, you've made it this far, b"H. It's still early in the year, but hopefully, the fact that we made it through Yom Kippur, hopefully physically and spiritually unscathed, is a sign that we will do just fine the rest of the year, provided of course that we don't go "sour" at some later point. If it can happen to Rebi Yochanan Kohen Gadol and Elisha ben Abuya, it can happen to just about anyone, God forbid.

But just like the weather, things can change pretty quickly, and sometimes almost without any sign, or at least one that we saw. How many times have people thought that the weatherman was wrong in predicting an upcoming thunderstorm, only to see a clear blue turn to thunder clouds in a matter of an hour...just after you lit the barbecue and invited your neighbors over.

Honestly though, was anyone really worried about their judgment heading into the Yemai Norayim? It's like predicting the arrival of Moshiach: after seeing so many predictions come and go without actualization, you just don't take them seriously anymore. Similarly, after surviving so many Rosh Hashanahs and Yom Kippurs without really changing too much, it can start to seem more like hype than reality.

That is a dangerous misunderstanding, which I will explain with an analogy.

Once a wealthy father decided to teach his two sons the importance of hard work and financial independence. He told his sons that they would be paid by the hour for the work they did, and that the money they earned would be the basis of their livelihood.

Concerned at first that they would fall short and not be able to pay their bills, they both worked hard. But after some time one of the sons worked a little less here and a little less there, and was surprised to see that somehow, he had enough money to pay his bills. The other son just kept working hard the entire time through.

The lazier son just got lazier and started to work even less, assuming that his father had been bluffing about only receiving what he earned. He tried

to convince his brother of his theory, but his brother wouldn't buy it and continued to work as if his parnassah depended upon it.

Many years later the father died. When it came time to divide the inheritance, the harder working son received far more than his lazier brother, who vehemently protested. Until, that is, the lawyer pulled out an accounting sheet that revealed the truth. It turned out that every time the one son fell short financially because he worked less, the father made up the difference from the son's future inheritance. What he received as an inheritance was what had remained after years of drawing from it. The lazier brother only had a small inheritance, and no longer had a father who could pay him for his work.

Likewise, the fact that we can "sail" through the Yemai Norayim and come out on the other side doesn't mean that we survived them, or at least completely survived them. We don't know if we fell short or by how much, and how much it cost us as a result. Best to work hard now and "earn" our livelihood while we can, to avoid shock and disappointment later when we find out that we ate away for years from our eternal inheritance.

This is a very short parsha that does not get enough attention. Some of the most important lessons about life are in Parashas HaAzinu, and overlooking them makes us vulnerable.

The lessons start from the very first word HaAzinu, but one that is really relevant in every generation is in this verse:

"Remember the days of old. Reflect upon the years of [other] generations. Ask your father, and he will tell you, your elders, and they will inform you." (Devarim 32:7)

"Remember the days of old: what God did to past generations who provoked Him to anger. Reflect upon the years of [other] generations: the generation of Enosh, whom [God] inundated with the waters of the ocean, and the generation of the Flood, whom [God] washed away...Ask your father -- these are the prophets, who are called "fathers"...your elders -- these are the Sages...and they will inform you: of the events of the former times." (Rashi)

What do we learn from this? First of all, that Jewish history repeats itself. If it didn't, then what relevance would the Past have to the Present? As we see today, so many people have a difficult time believing that what is going on today, including increased anti-Semitism, bears much resemblance to what happened in Europe for thousands of years leading up to and including the Holocaust. The world is different today, they say. History is different today, they think.

Maybe, but lesson #2 says, "Does that really make a difference?" Because, after all, it is not the gentile or turncoat Jew that creates the anti-Semitism. God does. They're just perpetrators of it, HIS

instruments to carry it out. Anti-Semitism, as the Gemora indicates (Shabbos 89a), originates from Heaven, and is not bound to place or people, only to the state of the Jewish nation.

Besides, says Lesson #3, who says that anti-Semitism is God's only Modus Operandi when it comes to getting at the Jewish people? Just ask Enosh and the Generation of the Flood. The Coronavirus was not anti-Semitic, but it certainly had a profound effect on the Jewish people all around the world. Before that, there was 9/11. There can be a financial meltdown. The bottom line is, don't wait to find out. Get the scoop as soon as possible, which brings us to Lesson #4.

Lesson #4 says, be particular about who you ask if you want to understand about what is going on in your generation. There are many sources of valuable information today, some more interesting than others, many more accurate than others. But there is only one source to turn to when it comes to putting current events in perspective of ancient history, and that's the Torah experts, prophets if you have them, and elders when you don't.

Acting incorrectly to situations can have all kinds of negative consequences, sometimes even death. It is one thing to ask an expert for direction, but just because a person is an expert in one area of knowledge doesn't mean that they are in others as well. The danger comes when people think that their personal expertise is enough to correctly assess situations that belong to other areas of expertise.

Of course, to need to ask and then not to ask is the worst. Recently I had a conversation with someone who was once religious but left it all behind. He simply "doesn't buy it," the whole God and Torah thing. If I had asked him for "proof" that God doesn't exist, I know he wouldn't have had any. No one does. If I had asked him if he'd like to hear evidence that makes the case for God and Torah, I know he would have declined.

If I had then asked this person, "Do you prefer to be secular at the cost of truth?" he would have probably said yes, or feeling silly, he would have just counter-claimed that I have no "proof" either without finding out if I do. He's like the son who stopped working hard because he didn't see his salary drop off, unaware that it is costing him elsewhere.

That brings us to Succos. Yom Kippur is for concretizing the truth in life, and Succos is about taking that truth out into the world.

It's a little like turning a shirt inside-out. From the outside, everything is neat and organized, even somewhat formal. Only on the inside do you find all the seams and hanging threads that keep the shirt together and looking nice on the outside.

Likewise, one of the nice things about a house is that it is private. All kinds of "interesting" things can take place in a person's house that they would never allow the outside world to see. All the "seams" and

"loose threads" that keep people together are hidden from public view...until, that is, Succos. That's when we turn the "shirt" inside-out by taking our inside-outside into the public domain.

Obviously aware of this change, many are on their best behavior for all of Succos, lest their neighbors hear family "secrets." But families will be families, and it is not possible to keep up the facade forever. The inconsistencies will surface and reveal themselves, and many have had their embarrassing moments during the chag.

But that is the mussar of Succos: *tocho k'boro* (Brochos 28a). It literally means that the inside should be like the outside, assuming that the outside is respectable. In other words, you have to be consistent, good on the outside and good on the inside. People who are never have to wonder if they said or did anything in public to embarrass themselves, since they always act like a *mentsch*.

I have seen, on more than one occasion, how a couple of good questions can undo the calm and controlled exterior of a person. They present themselves as people who have it all worked out, but the questions show that they really don't. They have just sidestepped some of the most important issues in life because God has let them. And they get real-l-l-l-y angry at you for pointing it out.

But Succos says that true *simcha* in life comes from being self-honest, from owning up to the truth on the outside and on the inside, especially on the inside. Ask the questions, the right ones to the right people. If you wait too long and use the status quo as a false sense of security, then the questions will come after you. They have after the Jewish people in every generation. By that time, the answers are usually so obvious, but also too late, and that's on us. ©2022 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

