



Parshas Ha'azinu

For the week ending 3 Tishrei 5758
3 & 4 October 1997

We wish all our readers a Gemar Chasima Tova.

Overview

Almost all of *Ha'azinu* is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons the heavens and the earth to stand as eternal witnesses to what will happen if the Jewish People sin and do not obey the Torah. He reminds the people to examine the history of the world, and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation – that Hashem “pulls the strings” of world events so that Bnei Yisrael can fulfill their destiny as His messengers in the world. Hashem’s kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a land of amazing abundance, and for defeating their enemies. But, this physical bounty leads the people to become self-satisfied and over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt the morals of the people. They worship empty idols and powerless gods, and indulge in all kinds of depravity. Hashem will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world. However, their only purpose is as a rod to chastise the Jewish People. When these nations think that it is through their own power that they have dominated Israel, Hashem will remind them that they are no more than a tool to do His will. The purpose of the Jewish People is fundamental – that man should know his Creator. Neither exile nor suffering can sever the bond between Hashem and His people, and eventually in the final redemption this closeness will be restored. Hashem will then turn His anger against the enemies of Israel, as though they were *His* enemies, showing no mercy to the tormentors of His people. Hashem then gives His last commandment to Moshe: That he should ascend Mount Nevo and be gathered there to his people.

Insights

This is the first Shabbos of the year. It is the prototype, the blueprint for the whole year. Because of this, we must be especially careful to guard its sanctity. The Talmud tells us that if the Jewish People had kept the first Shabbos properly, no nation could have ruled over them.

On Rosh Hashanah a new order is created for all the days of the year. Thus if the first Shabbos of the year is correctly observed, then the whole year follows suit.

Man was created on *Erev Shabbos*, on Friday afternoon, in order that he could immediately enter straight into Shabbos. But before Shabbos came, Man had already sinned.

Shabbos is an aid to *teshuvah*. As our Sages teach (*Berachos 37*), a *tzaddik gamur* (completely righteous person) cannot stand in the place of a *ba'al teshuvah* (someone who returns to Judaism).

Tzaddikim uphold the world, as it says in Proverbs “The *tzaddik* is the foundation of the world,” but “*teshuvah* preceded the world” (*Pesachim 54*) so the level of the *ba'al teshuvah* is before the world and above the world.

Just as the *ba'al teshuvah* is before the world, and thus above it, so too Shabbos has a radiance which is higher than the seven days of the week — a reflection of the world to come.

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SYMPATHETIC VIBRATION

“Ha’azinu....” (32:1)

Just as all the notes in a chord and all the voices and instruments in an orchestra blend together to form a single sound, so all creation *sings* in harmony to proclaim Hashem’s Unity. The *Parsha* of *Ha’azinu* is written in the form of a *song* to remind the Jewish People that all creation resonates in harmony with their actions, whether for good or for bad.

GARDENING - JEWISH STYLE 1

“May My teaching drop like rain, may My utterance flow like the dew” (32:1)

A violent storm. Winds howling. The rain lashes the ground. It seems as though the earth is being torn apart by the weather. And yet without this heavy downpour, nothing will grow properly. For if only the dew waters the ground, the heat of the sun will burn and shrivel the seeds.

Only if heavy rains water the ground will the dew do its job of bringing forth the flowering blossoms.

This is the way of Torah. If a person labors in the Jewish law, filling himself with the methodology and torrent of Talmudic logic, even though it may seem that he is struggling against a deluge, he will eventually bring forth strong and beautiful flowers.

He may feel storm-driven and pounded by the rains. Nevertheless, the fruits of his labors will also include the esoteric parts of Torah, the ‘dew’ of *Aggadita*. They will flower in his hands.

However, if he concerns himself only with the ‘dew’ of the Torah, the *Aggadita*, then in the withering ‘sun,’ the bright lights of secular cynicism, his Torah wisdom will wither and die, lacking the deep rain to nourish its roots.

Haftorah: Hoshea 14:2-10, Yoel 2:11-27; Micha 7:18:20

A BURNING SENSATION

An unbelievable sight. A young fellow with all the visible signs of an Orthodox Jew walks into MacTreife’s Burger Bar and orders a cheeseburger! He then proceeds to eat it in full view of everyone.

Later he suffers tremendous heartburn from the indigestible fast-food. Much later, however, he suffers an even greater ‘burn’ in the spiritual department.

The Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is called *Shabbos Shuva*, the *Shabbos of Return*. The name is taken from the first verse of the Haftorah “Return O Israel to Hashem for you have stumbled in your iniquity...”

The Meshech Chochma asks the question, “What does it mean to ‘stumble’ in ‘iniquity?’” If a person is already doing something wrong, how can he make it worse by *stumbling* in it?

GARDENING - JEWISH STYLE 2

“May my teaching fall like rain...”

The words of the Torah are like rain. Just as rain, when it falls, seems to leave no impression on the plants, and only later when the sun emerges from the clouds and shines on the earth do we see the results of the rain, so too are the words of the Torah. Even though at the time of hearing them their influence cannot be detected, nevertheless, in due course their effect becomes apparent.

MARRIAGE - JEWISH STYLE

One of the greatest figures in the history of Diaspora Jewry was Rabbeinu Gershom, who lived some one thousand years ago. He was given the title *Meor Hagolah* — the “Illuminator of the Exile.” Why was this illustrious title given to him and not to Rashi, or to Maimonides? What was so special about Rabbeinu Gershom that he merited such an august title?

Rabbeinu Gershom instituted a prohibition against divorcing a wife against her will, and also a ban on having two wives at the same time. But why was that so special?

As we mentioned above, the relationship of the Jewish People to Hashem is that of a wife to a husband. Hashem ‘married’ the Jewish People at Sinai, and even though when we were sent into exile it seemed that He had divorced us, the decrees of Rabbeinu Gershom are a guarantee to us, so to speak, that *Hashem cannot divorce us against our will, nor can He ‘take another wife’ from amongst the nations.*

It is for this reason that Rabbeinu Gershom is called the “Illuminator Of the Exile.” Because of his decrees, however dark the Exile becomes, it has a silver lining in it. For eventually Hashem must take us back. *We refuse to be divorced, and Hashem can ‘marry’ no other save His people Israel.*

There are two aspects to wrongdoing. The offense in itself and the desecration of Hashem’s name that may result from it.

It’s one thing for a Jew to slink into MacTreife’s wearing jeans, in ‘plain-clothes.’ It’s quite another to waltz in wearing full uniform. It’s one thing to commit *iniquity*, to give in to one’s desires, but it’s quite another to *stumble* and desecrate Hashem’s name in public.

Sources:

Shabbos Shuva - Sfias Emes
Sympathetic Vibration - Rabbi Gedalia Schorr
Gardening, Jewish Style 1 - based on the Netziv,
as heard from Rabbi Pinchas Kanterowitz
Gardening, Jewish Style 2 - Rabbi Bunim M’Pshische
Marriage, Jewish Style - Rabbi Moshe Shapiro
A Burning Sensation - Rabbi Calev Gestetner

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