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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON HAAZINU - 5766

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

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<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Haazinu

AFTER THE INTRODUCTION to his song in Haazinu, Moses turns to his central theme, the acts of G-d in history, beginning with a poetic declaration:

The rock - His work is perfect For all his ways are just; A G-d of faith without iniquity Righteous and fair is he. This is an axiom of prophetic faith. G-d is just. It is human beings who act unjustly. To this day, this verse is part of tzidduk ha-din, "accepting the justice" of the bad things that happen to us. It is a central part of the funeral service. Despite our sense of loss, we forego our anger at what may seem like the cruelty of fate.

There is, however, one ancient rabbinic interpretation of part of this verse that deserves reflection in its own right. It opens the way to one of the most far-reaching and revolutionary of all Jewish ideas. On the phrase, "A G-d of faith", Sifre (a compendium of commentaries on Bamidbar and Devarim dating back to the Mishnaic period) states:

"A G-d of faith" - He who had faith in the universe and created it.

Creation was an act of faith on the part of G-d.

When we use the word "faith" in a religious context we naturally assume that the word refers to our faith in G-d. Understandably so, for it is we who are finite in our understanding, whether of the universe or the full perspective of history. It is we who must make the leap from the known to the unknowable, from the visible to the invisible, from what we see and infer to what lies beyond.

Using the philosophical categories of the West, which come to us from ancient Greece, it makes no sense at all to speak of an act of faith on the part of G-d. G-d is, in terms of these categories, omniscient and omnipotent, all-knowing and all-powerful. He is the unmoved mover, the first cause, necessary being, the unchanging essence of reality. These propositions are surely true. Yet this is not G-d as we meet Him in the pages of Tenakh, the Hebrew Bible. Instead this is G-d as a philosophical abstraction, de-tached from the human drama. If the Torah teaches us anything it is that G-d is not detached from the human drama. He is inti-mately, even passionately, involved in it. There is a difference between the G-d of the philosophers and the G-d of the prophets; between - as Yehudah Halevi put it -- the G-d of Aristotle and the G-d of Abraham, even though they are the same G-d, whose parallel lines meet in infinity.

G-d as we encounter him in the Torah takes a risk, monumental in its implications. He creates one being, homo sapiens, capable of being itself creative; He creates, that is to say, a being in His own image. This one act

alters the whole nature of the universe. For there is now a being capable of language, thought, reflection, imagination and choice: the one being capable of conceiving the idea of G-d, but also, given the very nature of freedom and the human imagination, the one being capable of rebelling against G-d. The implication is the most far reaching in all of creation, for it means that there is now one form of life that can choose between obedience and disobedience, good and evil, turning nature to good ends or, G-d forbid, destroying it altogether.

Human freedom, the result of language and self-consciousness, is the great unknown and unknowable within the otherwise or-derly processes of nature mapped by science. There can never be a science of freedom, for the very concept is a contradiction in terms. Science is about causes, freedom about purposes. Science explains phenomena in terms of other phenomena that preceded them. Free action, by contrast, is explicable only in terms of the future we intend to bring about, not any past event, historical, biochemical or neuro-physiological. To be sure, there are many influences on human behaviour, some genetic, others cultural, environmental, social, economic and political. But they are influences, not causes in the sense in which that term is used in the natural sciences.

For almost every act we do, we could have chosen otherwise (the qualification 'almost' is necessary, for there are some acts - from reflex movements to unwilling behaviour under threat of death - that are not free in such a way as to render their agent re-sponsible for them; Jewish law calls such behaviour ones, i.e. action under coercion). Time and again in the course of civiliza-tion, human freedom has been called into question. There were some who believed in astrology: the fault lay not in us but in our stars. Philosophers like Spinoza and scientists like Comte believed that since we are physical beings in the material world, we are a form of matter, and all matter is governed by laws of cause and effect. The most recent form of determinism comes from neo-Darwinians. Human action is genetically determined. As one of the most extreme proponents of this view puts it, human beings are a gene's way of producing another gene. There were even figures within Judaism itself - the medieval philosopher Hasdai Crescas is the most famous example - who held that freewill was an illusion and that the only operative principle in human affairs is Divine providence (this view was, according to Josephus, held by the sectarians of the Second Temple period known as the Essenes). Maimonides, however, was emphatic in ruling out these views:

Free will is bestowed on every human being. If one desires to turn toward the good way and be righteous, he has the power to do so. If one wishes to turn toward the evil way and be wicked, he is at liberty to do so . . . Every human being may become right-eous like Moses our teacher, or wicked like Jeroboam; wise or foolish, merciful or cruel, niggardly or generous, and so with all other qualities . . . This doctrine is an important principle, the pillar of the Law and the commandments, as it is said, "See I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil," and again it is written, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing a curse." This means that the power is in your hands, and whatever a man desires to do among the things that human beings do, he can do, whether they are good or evil . . . If G-d had decreed that a person should be either righteous or wicked, or if there were some force inherent in his nature which irresistibly drew him to a particular course . . . what room would there be for the whole of the Torah? By what right or justice could G-d punish the wicked or reward the righteous? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth act justly?"

Some consequences of this view are obvious. It means that we are responsible for what we do. Judaism is an ethic of responsibil-ity. It also means that we are capable of recognizing and acknowledging our mistakes and choosing to act differently in the fu-ture. Hence the concept of teshuvah. This is turn entails that the future need not be like the past. With this realization a new con-cept was born: history as the arena of human development and growth. As the late J. H. Plumb pointed out, Jews were the first people to attach significance to, and see meaning in, history.

But there is another far more paradoxical consequence. G-d, by entering the human situation, enters time, and thus uncertainty, and thus risk. The grant of freedom to humanity was an immense act of self-limitation on the part of G-d - what the exponents of Lurianic kabbalah called tzimtzum. The nature of this drama is made clear at almost the beginning of biblical time:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Now Cain said to his brother - and while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Here the entire paradox of the Divine-human encounter is present in its pristine form. G-d knew that Cain was jealous of Abel and planned to kill him. That is why He speaks to him and warns him. Yet Cain does not listen. The murder takes place. How did G-d let it happen? To which the answer can only be: a grant of freedom to X by a superior power, which is suspended every time X acts in a way of which the superior power disapproves, is not a grant of freedom. This is a logical proposition true in all possible worlds. G-d does not abandon the world. He speaks to mankind; He teaches us how to behave; He instructs us in the ways of justice and equity, mercy and compassion. But if mankind closes its ears and refuses to listen, there is nothing G-d can do, short of taking away its freedom, the very thing He granted in creating mankind.

Hence creation involves risk. For us that is true of all acts of creation. Every technology can be misused. Every form of art can become idolatry. For G-d it is true of only one act of creation, namely the making of humanity. That is why here alone in the Torah's account of creation, we find not a simple "Let there be" but a deliberative prologue, "Let us make man in our image, in our own likeness . . ."

The creation of mankind was anything but straightforward. Homo sapiens (neo-Darwinianism notwithstanding) is not simply an evolutionary variant of other forms of life. The use of language, the future tense, an ability to recall the remote past, self-consciousness and deliberative rationality - the things that make homo sapiens unique - are qualitative leaps, not quantitative developments. A lump of metal and a car may be composed of the same elements but they are not the same thing, or the same kind of thing. That we share many elements of our DNA with the primates does not mean that man is simply a 'naked ape' or a 'gene-producing machine.' This is a fallacy, intelligible, even at a superficial level plausible, but a fallacy none the less. Because we can conceive intentions and act on them, no purely causal explanation of human behaviour will ever be adequate. We are dust of the earth, but there is within us the breath of G-d.

In creating mankind G-d was therefore taking the risk that one of His creations might turn against its Creator. Faith means the courage to take a risk. An extraordinary passage in the Babylonian Talmud explains this precisely:

R. Judah said in the name of Rav: When the Holy One blessed be he wished to create man, he first created a company of ministering angels and said to them, Is it your desire that we make man in our image? They answered, Sovereign of the universe, what will be his deeds? Such and such will be his deeds, he replied [He showed them the course of human history]. They thereupon exclaimed, Sovereign of the universe, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you think of him (Psalm 8: 5)? At this, He stretched out his finger and consumed them with fire. The same thing happened with a second company of angels. The third company said to him, Sovereign of the universe, what did it avail the former angels when they spoke to you? The whole world is yours; do whatever you wish. G-d then created mankind. When it came to the age of the Flood and of the division [of tongues, i.e. the Tower of Babel] whose deeds were corrupt they said to him, Sovereign of the universe, did not the first angels speak correctly? G-d replied: Even to old age I am the same, and even to grey hairs I will forebear (Isaiah 46:4).

The central question of faith is not "Does G-d exist?" but "Given that G-d

exists, how does man exist?" The angels had reason on their side. Knowing in advance the course of human history, the predominance of war over peace, corruption over justice, cruelty over compassion, what reason could there be for introducing so wayward a creature as man into the universe? To this, Judaism proposes a surpassingly beautiful answer. G-d has faith in man. To be sure, that faith is often abused, not to say betrayed. Yet G-d has infinite patience. "Even to grey hairs I will forebear." Though human beings inflict suffering on one another, G-d does not give up on his creation. We are here because of an act of supreme love on the part of the author of being. However corrupt we are, He does not relinquish the faith that we will change. However lost, He does not cease to believe that one day we will find our way back to him. For in his Torah, He has given us the map, the code, the guide, the way. Even a handful of righteous individuals justifies His faith in humanity.

One of the cruellest of all misrepresentations of Judaism is the claim that it is not a religion of love (tragically, this claim was made by those who should have known that the two great commands of love, "You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, all your soul and all your might" [Deut. 6:5] and "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" [Lev. 19: 18] come from the Mosaic books). Judaism is a faith suffused with love; but infinitely transcending man's love of G-d is G-d's love of mankind, for which (in the necessarily human language, which is the only language we can know) He suffers every time human beings wrong one another, and yet which He is prepared to suffer rather than take from mankind the unique gift of freedom He bestowed on them, which is necessarily freedom to do wrong as well as freedom to do right.

According to Judaism, the classic questions of Western theology are precisely wrong, indeed upside down - for the Torah is not man's book of G-d, but G-d's book of mankind. More than we search for G-d, G-d searches for us, asking us, as He did to Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" In its simple way, the comment of the Sifre is as profound as theology gets. Creation, even G-d's creation when it involves endowing a creature with the capacity to act in freedom, involves risk and therefore faith. "G-d of faith" means, "He who had faith in the universe and created it." I know of no lovelier account of the (often unlovely) human condition. We are here because someone wanted us to be. We are free because the Master of all made space for our freedom. We are at home in the universe to the extent that we make of our universe a home for G-d.

From: RabbiWein@jewishdestiny.com Sent: Wednesday, October 12, 2005 12:05 AM To: Subject: Rabbi Wein's Weekly Columns

Jerusalem Post October 14, 2005

PRICE GOUGING

When demand far outstrips supply, or when someone obtains a monopoly over goods that the public needs or wants, or when tragedies strike and people are forced to obtain certain goods and services to survive in all of these circumstances greed takes over and the prices for these items are suddenly overly inflated. The Talmud calls this phenomenon *hafkaat shearim* - the "re-moval" of ordinary fair pricing by overcharging for the items in need. Needless to say, the Talmud regards this as an unfair business practice.

A number of news reports over the past month have brought this issue to mind. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there were numerous instances of unconscionable price gouging in the Gulf states in the USA for all imaginable items ranging from gasoline to water. The legal authorities have promised to bring the price gougers to justice but it is increasingly unlikely that they will be able to get to all of them. Making profit over another human beings suffering or desperate need is an ancient vice of humankind. Only a moral conscience can seemingly counteract this built-in venality that afflicts many in times of shortages and need.

In an article that recently appeared in the Jerusalem Post, a particular type of holy Jewish price gouging was reported. It seems that only one dealer was able to obtain lulavim the palm fronds that Jews require for Succot from Egypt this year. This dealer, according to the article in the newspaper, having cornered the market, intends to charge up to five times the normal price for a lulav. I do not know whether this actually happened, although the temptation to do so is certainly a strong one. Jews go to great lengths to obtain the proper species to fulfill the mitzva of arba minim on Succot. Usually the etrog/citron is the most expensive of the four required species, but if the threat of the lulav price gouging had come to pass, the lulav/palm frond, usually relatively inexpensive, would now come to rival the price of the etrog. Taking unfair monetary advantage of Jews who are at-tempting to observe a mitzva was especially condemned by the rabbis of the Talmud. The rabbis likened the practice to charging usurious interest and as a violation of the Torah principle that your brother shall be enabled to live with you on equal terms. The Torah envisions a fair, equal and level playing field in a just society's economic functions. Price gouging is a clear violation of this basic rule of the Torah.

Talmud Yerushalmi states that those who are mafkiei shearim price gougers are subject to particular Divine wrath and being eventually "broken" by God. The halacha does provide for the recovery of actual costs and a reasonable profit (usually estimated to be no more than a sixth, but sometimes can be as much as a half on certain "luxury" items) by the seller. Thus, if and when the sellers costs rise he may legitimately pass that increase on to the consumer. The Torah also allows for price fluctuations due to market conditions and real shortages. But if the sellers new higher price is based on his artificially created monopoly and his control of the supply, then that price charged to the consumer is considered to be excessive and a clear violation of Torah law. The rabbis even hesitated to proclaim extra fast days (because of drought or disease or other dangers) because of the danger of price gouging immediately after the fast on food items. When the fish mongers raised the price of fish before Shabat or Yom Tov, the rabbis decreed that people should abstain from purchasing fish for Shabat and Yom Tov unless the price returned to normal levels. The Mishna relates to us that once in Temple times, the sellers of doves necessary for certain sacrifices raised their prices inordinately. The rabbis threatened to free the people through an ingenious halachic procedure from having to bring doves at all for the sacrifice. The price of doves immediately returned to its normal levels. In our time, in many communities, the rabbis have decreed a price ceiling on what can be spent to purchase an etrog. In many instances, entering a partnership to purchase the arba minim thus reducing demand is encouraged. I doubt therefore that the threat of the lulav price gouging will have actually materi-alized. (This column is being written before Succot.) Nevertheless, the threat of price gouging, especially in items necessary for the performance of mitzvot, should be roundly condemned. Price gouging is a clear violation of the basic Jewish Torah value that "its paths are the ways of pleasantness."

Weekly Parsha October 14, 2005 HAAZINU

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

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

Our grandson, Eliezer Wein, will be celebrating his bar mitzvah here in Jerusalem this parsha of Haazinu. I pray that G-d grant him all blessings and great accomplishments. But I also pray that he internalize within him this message of the song of Haazinu. In that song is the entire history of his heritage and past. It also contains the outline of his future and of the tasks that lie before him as a faithful and loyal Jew. The message and predictions of the song are inescapable. The covenant between G-d and Israel is an unbreakable one with no escape clauses built into it. The song of Haazinu with its demands and challenges is indelibly committed to the collective memory of the Jewish people. It accompanies us, nationally and personally, throughout our lives and their events. It is the witness to our achievements and weaknesses, our progress and regressions. Moshe calls on heaven and earth to hear this song for it will never be forgotten from the hearts and souls of the eternal people of Israel. The song, so to speak, has become part of the natural order of things in the world. By measuring our lives and actions by the yardstick that the song lays out for us, we can determine our correct course in life. Every choice in life demands first listening to Haazinu before making choices. Ultimately, Haazinu is the song of soaring hope and human achievement. Mazal tov, Eliezer and learn the song!

Shabat shalom. Gmar tov.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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From: Peninim-bounces@shemayisrael.com on behalf of Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Friday, October 14, 2005 4:59 PM To: Peninim Parsha Subject:

Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARSHAS HAAZINU May My teaching drop like rain, may My utterance flow like dew. (32:2) Torah is compared to life - sustaining, nourishing rain and to dew that is even more welcome than rain, because it arrives at a time that never inconveniences anyone. The commentators, each in his own manner, explain the simile of rain and dew with regard to the Torah. They focus on the ability of rain to generate growth and development. I would like to add one point concerning a function of rain, which could also serve as a metaphor for Torah. One of the extreme qualities of rain is that it causes whatever seeds or vegetation are in the ground to germinate and grow. In other words, if there are weeds or thorns in the ground, the rain will enable them to grow tall and strong. Torah is also like that. If one is worthy, the Torah will illuminate his eyes and he will be able to perceive the great-ness and wonders of the Almighty. If, however, the individual is of a base character, morally deviant from a society guided by spiritual ascendancy, the Torah can have an adverse effect on him. He may use it to support his unconscionable behavior and practices.

We often forget that the early secularists were erudite in Torah literature. They used their Torah knowledge to develop loopholes in the law and to justify their rebellion against Hashem. The powers of reason which are

honed through Torah study can them-selves become the catalyst for undermining the Torah. Indeed, the founders of the Haskalah, Enlightenment, claimed that logic is the sole medium by which man can acquire knowledge. Thus, they reduced Revelation to nothing more than Divine legislation, dismissing the idea of revealed religion. They removed the Divine from the Torah, supporting their position with perverted logic based upon their knowledge of the Torah. In this case, the Torah nurtured weeds and thorns, enabling them to grow. The darkness that had not originally been expunged from this individual is nurtured by the light that was intended to illuminate his life. Just like the rain. Indeed, is this not the very reason the farmer rids his field of weeds and thorns prior to planting the new seed?

Rashi interprets the pasuk in Hoshea 14:10, "For the ways of Hashem are straight - the righteous traverse them and the wicked stumble upon them," in this manner. The very same path of G-d which serves to elevate the righteous also serves to make the wicked stumble.

Chazal make the same point with regard to the study of Torah. "For (those who study Torah) diligently, it becomes a source of life. For those who study it laxly, it becomes a deadly poison" (Shabbos 88b). The very Torah that is a life-giving elixir to the one who studies seriously becomes a poison to the one who views its study as a mere trophy or even as an intellectual exercise. There is nothing as pernicious as evil feeding and drawing upon the sources of good. When it is combined with evil character traits, the light of Torah does not mitigate the evil, but rather feeds and fans its flames. If a person does not entirely uproot the bad and evil within him, then light and darkness both have an equal influence upon him.

This idea is very aptly explained by the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna in his commentary to Mishlei 19:9. He cites the pasuk in Tehillim 85:12, "Truth will sprout from the earth, and righteousness will peer from heaven." He explains that the earth maintains the at-tribute of truth in its manner of producing its bounty. It grows whatever is planted therein. If wheat is planted, it will produce wheat, etc. From the heavens comes forth rain which is likened to righteousness - in that it is "fair," raining down equally on all vegetation. Thus, if one plants poisonous fruits in the ground, the "righteous" rain will nurture it and the "truthful" earth will produce it. Likewise, Torah, which comes to us from Above, provides the individual with the opportunity to attain whatever his heart desires. If it desires growth in yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, it will enable him to reach this goal. If, however, his heart is filled with a bitter, acrimonious seed, it will also give that sentiment the ability to grow. We should take a lesson from the farmer and purify our hearts, so that the truth that sprouts will be the truth of Torah.

Hashem will see and grow angry from the provocation of His sons and daughters. He will say, "I shall hide My face from them and see what their end will be; for they are a generation of capriciousness, children without trust. (32:19, 20)

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonenfeld, zl, gave a noteworthy interpretation of the above pasuk during a dialogue he had with Ben Hillel, one of the primary leaders of the secular Zionist movement. Ben Hillel had been raised as an Orthodox Jew and had rejected his upbringing, choosing a lifestyle of secularism instead. Regrettably, as was the case among many of his colleagues, there existed a bitter contempt for the path of life chosen by his parents and forebears. At every juncture, he would speak with disdain and derision to and about his observant brethren. Seeing Rav Yosef Chaim walking down the street, Ben Hillel approached him and said to him superciliously, "Rav Yosef Chaim, as a wise, intelligent man, have you not seen the folly of your clinging to an archaic tradition? You are a man who possesses keen insight and wisdom. Can you not see that there is no future to Orthodoxy? The young generations have turned away from your obsolete observances. Any intelligent person can see that the trend of the future is

modernity, secularism and a complete break with the past. In another twenty, thirty years your brand of Judaism with its old-fashioned views will disappear completely. Concede and stop waging war with us. Do you really believe that your grandchildren will adhere to your way of life? They, too, will attend regular progressive schools, if they do not want to lag behind!" The man's chutzpah was outrageous. It did not faze Rav Yosef Chaim. With total conviction and equanimity, he looked Ben Hillel right in the eye and asked, "Are you so sure that your grandchildren will follow in your ways? On the contrary, I am quite certain that they will renege your perverse philosophies, end up attending yeshivos and growing into fully committed, observant Jews. Your descendants will one day open their eyes and see the shallowness of your beliefs, the vacuousness of your so-called ideologies. They will clearly see that your entire belief is based on falsehood and nurtured in deceit."

"What makes you so sure that you are right?" Ben Hillel asked him. "It says so clearly in the Torah," Rav Yosef Chaim replied. "Hashem will see and grow angry from the provocation of His sons and daughters.' Why does the Torah use the name Hashem which symbolizes G-d's attribute of rachamim, mercy, when speaking of His anger? The Name Elokim, indicating the attribute of Din, strict Justice, would have been more appropriate. The answer is that, despite the Jews' provocation of Hashem, He will not respond in anger. He will certainly be disappointed and become an-gered, but He will not lash out at them. They will be granted a reprieve during which time the Almighty will stand by and wait patiently. Why? Because Hashem knows that their lapse in faith is temporary, 'for they are a generation of capriciousness.' They reverse themselves quickly. Thus, by the time the next generation appears, they will have reversed the disastrous course taken by their forebears. 'They are children without trust,' a new generation that does not give credence to the ersatz beliefs of their par-ents. They will quickly realize the void in their parents' lives and the vacuity of their ideologies. This will spur them on to search for a life of meaning, a life rich with meaning, a life filled with spiritual content, a life of moral rectitude, a life above the base desires of their physical dimension." Ben Hillel said no more. He really had no response, because deep within his inner psyche, he knew that Rav Yosef Chaim was correct. Rav Yosef Chaim saw the future of the Baal Teshuvah movement, the waves of Jews who would return to a life of com-mitment and faith, to the life that has sustained our nation throughout the millennia.

Now that we know the fact, we must search for the reason. Why did so many return? What motivates thousands to reject the "fun" that is so endemic to today's hedonistic society? What voice tells them to stop what they are doing in order to commence a search for a deeper meaning to life? Last, what causes someone who has had no contact with any form of observance for two or three generations to drop it all to become frum, observant?

In the end of the days, in the period preceding Moshiach Tzidkeinu, there will be a great returning to Hashem. This is prophe-sized by the Navi Yechezkel and the Navi Malachi. It is as if Hashem is bringing back those whom He has selected to be a part of the Jewish People as they go on to their ultimate redemption. During this period, Hashem returns to us. To explain this concept further, we cite from the Tiferes Shlomo, who notes that when Yaakov Avinu bid farewell to his children, he said, "Come together, and I will tell you what will happen to you in the end of the days." The word "yikra," what will happen, is spelled in an unusual manner. It should be spelled with a "hay" at the end, instead of the aleph. The aleph at the end changes the meaning from "(what will) happen" to "calling." The Tiferes Shlomo explains that when one acquires an article he must make a kinyan, an act of acquisition. For movable objects or for animals, a kinyan meshichah, pulling the object to oneself, is sufficient. When dealing with animals, if striking it or calling it will cause it to move, the kinyan meshichah takes effect.

The period prior to the advent of Moshiach is the time when Hashem takes

possession of the Jewish People. In the period prior to the end of the days, Hashem took possession via the medium of a stick; He drew us closer when we were beaten by the nations of the world. It was the persecutions to which we were subjected that catalyzed our movement back to the Almighty. Look at the pattern of history. Every period of assimilation was followed by oppression and persecution. It was always the stick that brought us back.

Not so in the end of the days. Yaakov Avinu alludes to the idea that prior to Moshiach's coming, Hashem will "call" us. This calling will engender within us a desire to come home, to return to Him. This is why the Torah uses an "aleph" for "vayikra" instead of a "hay." It will not be a happening; it will be a Divine calling. Those that are fortunate to listen will return and be embraced by Hashem.

For how could one pursue a thousand, and two cause a myriad to flee, if not that their Rock had sold them out, and Hashem had delivered them. (32:30) One of the most challenging and, hence, often discussed theological issues is the holocaust that destroyed most of European Jewry. There is no shortage of papers that have been written on the subject and no dearth of self-proclaimed experts and "proph-ets" who have attempted to attribute rationale to the calamitous events that have left an indelible imprint on the Jewish psyche. First, the term holocaust is a misnomer. Horav Simcha Wasserman, zl, notes that the Hebrew word used for holocaust is shoah, which means "disaster." The word "aster" means "star" as in "asterisk," which is the symbol used to make a star. People have associated mazal, luck/fortune, with stars. Hence, a disaster means a bad star, bad luck, referring to something that "just hap-pens." Shoah then becomes an occurrence that just happened, something inexplicable. It is a tragedy that just happened with no apparent reason.

There is nothing further from Jewish thought than such a statement. Absolutely nothing in Jewish life simply "just happens." Everything occurs by design of the Almighty. Thus, if the words "shoah" or "holocaust" leads one to believe that these events "just happened" to us, then they are a misnomer and misleading. Perhaps a more correct term would be "tragedy." The European tragedy was designed by Hashem. We do not know why. All we can do is study patterns in history and attempt to understand them as a lesson for the present and a portent for the future.

How did it happen? How did the Jews of Europe go like lambs to the slaughter? These are some of the questions asked by self-decreed academics, who manipulate their audiences to support their own insecurities and religious shortcomings. Questions such as these are more provocative than explanatory. While many responses have been given, the one most cogent and theologically acceptable is found in our parsha.

In Shiras Haazinu, Moshe Rabbeinu relates to Klal Yisrael many of the experiences that they will undergo. He does not shy away from the unpleasant and the tragic. The song is a prophecy, which tells explicitly what is going to happen and why. Hashem tells Moshe that the song is an "eid." The word "eid," explains Rav Simchah, has two meanings. One definition is "witness," some-thing which testifies. The second meaning is "warning." Shiras Haazinu is a warning of what will occur as the result of certain behavior, as well as a witness attesting to the fact that what is predicted will -- and has -- come true over the millennia.

Therefore, when we ask the questions of why and how, we should look into the Torah, and we will discover that the question had actually already been asked 3300 years ago: "For how could one pursue a thousand, and two cause a myriad to flee?" Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, the venerable mashgiach of Mir and Ponevez would point to this pasuk and say that Moshe was asking the question that so many have asked concerning the European tragedy.

While these are painful questions - questions that have alienated many - the Torah gives the answer: "If not that their Rock had sold them out, and Hashem has delivered them." Their passive response was not natural. It did

not "just happen." It was a tragedy decreed by Hashem - a tragedy of epic proportion - a tragedy that we, with our limited ability, cannot understand. Let me explain the meaning of an issue that is inexplicable. In Parashas Ki Sissa (Shemos 33:18-23), Moshe asks Hashem, "Hare-ini na es kovodecha," "Please reveal to me Your Glory." Hashem responds, "V'raisa es achorai, u'panai lo yeira'u." "You may see behind Me, but the front of Me you cannot see." The Yalkut Shimoni explains this dialogue, to be asserting that as inhabitants of this world, with its limitations, one cannot possibly comprehend events that are intellectually perplexing and emotionally chal-lenging. One can only see the "footprints" of Providence as Hashem has passed.

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, explains this Midrash in light of the following incident. He was once invited to the home of an art connoisseur, who proudly displayed to him his collection of paintings. As Rav Aharon approached one of the paintings to get a closer look, his host said, "Rabbi, you cannot appreciate the painting unless you are at a distance of five feet." If the work of a human artist cannot be fully appreciated unless it is viewed from a distance, how much more so the work of Hashem, the Cosmic Artist of the world. Only after Hashem has completed the canvas of history will His meanings emerge and His rationale be com-prehended.

To attempt to rationalize the European tragedy is to try to assess a complex canvas from a distance of two inches. Hashem told Moshe that His work can only be understood in retrospect, from a distance of time. The grasp of our limited intellect does not permit us access to the realm of comprehension with regard to the troubling events that occur. To attempt to rationalize Hashem's actions is to claim knowledge of Hashem's Master Plan.

On the other hand, one may and should be a student of history in terms of searching for patterns. These patterns only give us something to consider, a way of viewiing the present as a map for preparing for the future. Rav Aharon makes a strong point concerning those who attribute reasons to the tragedy. He distinguishes between: a rationalization, a theological explanation of the cause of the tragedy; and theorizing from a historical and logical perspective, based upon the Torah, why a tragedy has oc-curred. In other words, the famous statement issued by Horav Meir Simchah, zl, of Dvinsk, in his Meshech Chochmah, prior to the European tragedy, pinpointing the secular Jewish movement, whose roots were in Berlin, as the precursor of the tragedy is not a theological rationale, but rather, a historical perspective and portent for European Jewry. Indeed, noted secular historians concede that Biblical criticism, which emerged in Berlin, helped fuel anti-Semitism in Europe. As long as the Bible was an ac-cepted and revered volume of Jewish theology, the Jews were not despised nationally, even though they were persecuted. It was only after "our own" Bible critics began to chip away at the credibility of the Torah, in their efforts to justify their own immoral miscreant behavior, that hatred for the Jews began to swell in the hearts of their gentile neighbors. Our exalted status was diminished, and roots of anti-Semitism that had been dormant were energized. After all is said and done, this tragedy and the others that have befallen our nation are beyond the scope of our intellectual grasp. As Torah Jews, we accept Divine will and bow our heads in awed silence to those who, over the millennia, have been persecuted and murdered Al Kiddush Hashem. To paraphrase Rav Aharon, "Following that silence, we must raise our heads and declare to the world, 'Lo amus, ki echyeh va'asaper maasei kah,' 'I will not die; I will live and tell the Glory of G-d. (Tehillim 118:17)'"

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From: kolhakollel-owner@torah.org [<mailto:kolhakollel-owner@torah.org>]
On Behalf Of Rabbi Pinchas Avruch Sent: Friday, October 14, 2005 10:06 AM
To: kolhakollel@torah.org Subject: **Kol HaKollel** - Parshas Ha'azinu -

Sensitivity Training

Kol HaKollel The Voice of the Milwaukee Kollel A Weekly Torah Publication

PARSHAS HA'AZINU - 12 TISHREI 5766 SENSITIVITY TRAINING by

Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

Just hours before his death, Moshe teaches the Jewish Nation a song with his final words of motivation and praises of G-d. It begins, "The Rock, perfect is His work, for all His ways are justice; a G-d of faith, without iniquity, righteous and fair is He." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 32:4) Rashi explains the term "of faith", which connotes being trusted to fulfill a promise, refers to G-d's trustworthiness to pay the righteous for their righteousness in the World to Come. The seemingly superfluous statement of "without iniquity" refers to the reality that even the wicked are given reward for their righteousness, but their payment is in this world.

This does not appear balanced. If rewards in this world are indeed comparable to rewards in the next, should not the righteous be allotted some physical rewards for their good deeds as are the wicked? If the rewards are not comparable, why should the wicked people be denied full payment for the few good deeds they did?

Our Sages teach us (Pirkei Avos/Ethics of the Fathers 4:22) that one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come is better than an entire life of pleasure in this world. The righteous are not rewarded for fulfilling mitzvos (G-d's commands) in this world is because any reward in this world would be substandard. Why then do such rewards suffice for the non-righteous? Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1) explains that when a person dies, his soul, imbued with all the values and character with which it lived, returns to G-d's realm - a "world" where all experiences, including all rewards, are exclusively spiritual. A person whose focus in life was physical and temporal pleasures would find this situation the greatest torture. He would find himself in a realm in which he cannot have the things he truly wants, and he never developed the tools to appreciate the spiritual treasures he does have. He does not value this cache for the reward it truly is, so how can G-d reward him for the mitzvos he did do? He gives this person the physical currencies he DOES value - wealth, honor, luxuries - the remuneration of this temporal world. While such compensation is comparatively insignificant, it is the reward he has chosen for himself. But the person who focused on striving to connect to the Divine, developing his character and G-d consciousness with Torah study and mitzvah fulfillment, the physical necessities of this world are a hindrance. With the demise of the physical body, those limitations are removed and the soul can connect with G-d, fully able to experience and enjoy the ultimate pleasure.

The development of that relationship, the genesis of that G-d consciousness, is the product of the sensitivity training we choose to utilize during our physical lives in this world. Throughout the just completed Yom Kippur we often proclaimed, "For we are Your people and You are our G-d, we are Your Children and You are our Father. we are Your people and You are our King, we are your designated and You are our Designated." Now, we need to live it!

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1891-1954; in Michtav Me'Eliyahu, his collected writings and discourses; from England and, later, B'nai Brak, he was one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement

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