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from: The **Rabbi Sacks** Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>

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subject: A Leader's Call to Responsibility (Ha'azinu 5782)

When words take wing, they modulate into song. That is what they do here in Ha'azinu as Moses, with the Angel of Death already in sight, prepares to take leave of this life. Never before had he spoken with such passion. His language is vivid, even violent. He wants his final words never to be forgotten. In a sense he has been articulating this truth for forty years, but never before with such emotion. This is what he says:

Give ear, O heavens, that I may speak,

Earth, hear the sayings of my mouth...

The Rock, His acts are perfect,

For all His ways are just.

A faithful God without wrong,

Right and straight is He.

He is not corrupt; the defect is in His children,

A warped and twisted generation.

Is this the way you repay God,

Ungrateful, unwise people?

Is He not your Father, your Master?

He made you and established you. (Deut. 32:1-6)

Do not blame God when things go wrong. That is what Moses feels so passionately. Don't believe, he says, that God is there to serve us. We are here to serve Him and through Him be a blessing to the world. God is straight; it is we who are complex and self-deceiving. God is not there to relieve us of responsibility. It is God who is calling us to responsibility.

With these words Moses brings to closure the drama that began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When they sinned, Adam blamed the woman, the woman blamed the serpent. So it was when God began creating, and so it still is in the twenty-first century secular time.

The story of humanity has been, for the most part, a flight from

responsibility. The culprits change. Only the sense of victimhood remains. It wasn't us. It was the politicians. Or the media. Or the bankers. Or our genes. Or our parents. Or the system, be it capitalism, communism or anything between. Most of all, it is the fault of the others, the ones not like us, infidels, sons of Satan, children of darkness, the unredeemed. The perpetrators of the greatest crime against humanity in all of history were convinced it wasn't them. They were "only obeying orders." When all else fails, blame God. And if you don't believe in God, blame the people who do. To be human is to seek to escape from responsibility.

That is what makes Judaism different. It is what made some people admire Jews and others hate them. For Judaism is God's call to human responsibility. From this call you can't hide, as Adam and Eve discovered when they tried, and you can't escape, as Jonah learnt in the belly of a fish.

What Moses was saying in his great farewell song can be paraphrased thus: "Beloved people, I have led you for forty years, and my time is coming to an end. For the last month, since I began these speeches, these devarim, I have tried to tell you the most important things about your past and future. I beg you not to forget them.

"Your parents were slaves. God brought them and you to freedom. But that was negative freedom, chofesh. It meant that there was no-one to order you about. That kind of freedom is not inconsequential, for its absence tastes like unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Eat them once a year so you never forget where you came from and who brought you out.

"But don't think that chofesh alone can sustain a free society. When everyone is free to do what they like, the result is anarchy, not freedom. A free society requires cherut, the positive freedom that only comes when people internalise the habits of self-restraint so that my freedom is not bought at the expense of yours, or yours at the cost of mine.

"That is why I have taught you all these laws, judgments and statutes. They are not arbitrary rules. None of them exists because God likes giving laws. God gave laws to the very structures of matter – laws that generated a vast, wondrous, almost unfathomable universe. If God were only interested in giving laws, He would have confined Himself to the things that obey those laws, namely matter without mind and life-forms that know not liberty.

"The laws God gave me and I gave you exist not for God's sake but for ours. God gave us freedom – the most rare, precious, unfathomable thing of all other than life itself. But with freedom comes responsibility. That means that we must take the risk of action. God gave us the land but we must conquer it. God gave us the fields but we must plough, sow and reap them. God gave us bodies but we must tend and heal them. God is our Father; He made us and established us. But parents cannot live their children's lives. They can only show them, by instruction and love, how to live.

"So when things go wrong, don't blame God. He is not corrupt; we are. He is straight; it is we who are sometimes warped and twisted."

That is the Torah's ethic of responsibility. No higher estimate has ever been given of the human condition. No higher vocation was ever entrusted to mortal creatures of flesh and blood.

Judaism does not see human beings, as some religions do, as irretrievably corrupt, stained by original sin, incapable of good without God's grace. That is a form of faith but it is not ours. Nor do we see religion as a matter of blind submission to God's will. That too is a form of faith but not ours.

We do not see human beings, as the pagans did, as the playthings of capricious gods. Nor do we see them, as some scientists do, as mere matter, a gene's way of producing another gene, a collection of chemicals driven by electrical impulses in the brain, without any special dignity or sanctity, temporary residents in a universe devoid of meaning that came into existence for no reason and will one day, equally for no reason, cease to be.

We believe that we are God's image, free as He is free, creative as He is creative, We exist on an infinitely smaller and more limited scale to be sure, but still we are the one point in all the echoing expanse of space where the universe becomes conscious of itself, the one life form capable of shaping its own destiny: choosing, therefore free, therefore responsible. Judaism is

God's call to responsibility.

Which means: thou shalt not see thyself as a victim. Do not believe as the Greeks did that fate is blind and inexorable, that our fate once disclosed by the Delphic oracle, has already been sealed before we were born, that like Laius and Oedipus we are fated, however hard we try to escape the bonds of fate. That is a tragic view of the human condition. To some extent it was shared in different ways by Spinoza, Marx and Freud, the great triumvirate of Jews-by-descent who rejected Judaism and all its works.

Instead like Viktor Frankl, survivor of Auschwitz, and Aaron T. Beck, co-founder of cognitive behavioural therapy, we believe we are not defined by what happens to us but rather by how we respond to what happens to us. That itself is determined by how we interpret what happens to us. If we change the way we think – which we can, because of the plasticity of the brain – then we can change the way we feel and the way we act. Fate is never final. There may be such a thing as an evil decree, but penitence, prayer and charity can avert it. And what we cannot do alone we can do together, for we believe “it is not good for man to be alone.” (Gen. 2:18)

So Jews developed a morality of guilt in place of what the Greeks had, a morality of shame. A morality of guilt makes a sharp distinction between the person and the act, between the sinner and the sin. Because we are not wholly defined by what we do, there is a core within us that remains intact – “My God, the soul You gave me is pure” – so that whatever wrong we may have done, we can repent and be forgiven. That creates a language of hope, the only force strong enough to defeat a culture of despair.

It is that power of hope, born whenever God's love and forgiveness gives rise to human freedom and responsibility, that has made Judaism the moral force it has always been to those whose minds and hearts are open. But that hope, says Moses with a passion that still sears us whenever we tread it afresh, does not just happen. It has to be worked for and won. The only way it is achieved is by not blaming God. He is not corrupt. The defect is in us, His children. If we seek a better world, we must make it. God teaches us, inspires us, forgives us when we fail and lifts us when we fall, but we must make it. It is not what God does for us that transforms us; it is what we do for God.

The first humans lost paradise when they sought to hide from responsibility. We will only ever regain it if we accept responsibility and become a nation of leaders, each respecting and making space for those not like us. People do not like people who remind them of their responsibility. That is one of the reasons (not the only one, to be sure) for Judeophobia through the ages. But we are not defined by those who do not like us. To be a Jew is to be defined by the One who loves us.

The deepest mystery of all is not our faith in God but God's faith in us. May that faith sustain us as we heed the call to responsibility and take the risk of healing some of the needless wounds of an injured but still wondrous world.

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Consider the Changes

Ha'azinu (Deuteronomy 32)

by Rabbi Yisrocher Frand

Consider the Changes

Remember the days of old, consider the years of each generation. (32:7)

History is an integral part of Jewish life. The Torah tells us, “Remember the days of old, consider the years (shenos) of each generation; ask your father and he will tell you, your grandfather and he will say it to you.” A Jew must always remember the Exodus, the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the forty years in the desert and all the other seminal events of our history that form the foundation of our faith and our observances. A Jew must see Hashem's hand in the events of the past and their consequences. As a secular philosopher once said, “Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to

repeat it.”

This we all know and understand. But what is the significance of the repetitive language of the verse? How does “remember the days of old” differ from “consider the years of each generation”?

The Menachem Tzion resolves this question homiletically. The word for “years” used here, shenos, can also be translated as “the changes.” Consider the changes of each generation. Understand that the lessons of the past must be applied to the present with wisdom and discernment. Times change, people change, circumstances change. Not everything that worked in the past will work today, and not everything that failed in the past would fail today. The Torah can never be changed but it has enough built-in flexibility to allow it to adapt perfectly to all times and places. We have to think and consider hard before we make the application.

The Divine Protectorate

With broad strokes Moshe present the sweep of history, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of each generation; ask your father and he will tell you, your grandfather and he will say it to you. When the Supreme One gave nations their portion, when He separated the children of man, He set the borders of peoples according to the number of the people of Israel.”

Rashi gives a Midrashic interpretation of the references. “Remember the days of old” is a general admonition to recall what happened to our predecessors who angered Hashem. “Consider the years of each generation” refers to the generation of Enosh who were inundated by ocean waters and the generation of the Great Flood. “When the Supreme One gave nations their portion, when He separated the children of man” refers to the generation of the Dispersion when people tried to build the Tower of Babel.

We have a rule, however, that the plain meaning of the verse is always significant. The simple interpretation of these verses is an admonition to us to understand history and learn its lessons.

As Jews, we believe that the Almighty is not only the Creator but that He is also the Guide of history. We see His hand in the historical events that we witness. And the Torah is telling us that “He set the borders of peoples according to the number of the people of Israel.” The ultimate purpose of the wars and conflicts that shape the world, the shifting borders of the globe, all of these are determined by the Divine plan for the Jewish people. We may not see it immediately. We may never see it at all. But in some way, the destiny of the Jewish people turns the intricate wheels of history.

Rav Elchanan Wasserman, whom the Nazis murdered at the beginning of the Second World War, quotes these verses as proof that all world history revolves around the Jewish people. “When the Treaty of Versailles drew a new map of Europe [at the end of the First World War],” he writes, “the borders were already drawn in Heaven.”

One does not have to be a politically astute individual to appreciate the impact of the breakup of the Soviet Union on the Jewish people. But we sometimes think the smaller details do not really affect us. What difference is it to us whether or not Azerbaijan goes its own way? What difference is it to us if Chechnya declares its independence? But this is a mistake. It makes a difference – even if we don't see it.

What difference did it make if the Ottoman Empire sided with the Allies or the Germans during the First World War? Who at the time gave it a second thought from the perspective of the Jewish people? But in retrospect, it was a critical decision. By choosing the wrong side, the Ottoman Turks were forced to surrender their possessions in the Middle East, among these a dusty strip of land called Palestine. Great Britain received the mandate for Palestine, which opened the way for the establishment of modern-day Israel.

When we see maps changing, we need to hold our breaths. Somehow or another, this will affect us, either for the good or, Heaven forbid, otherwise. Sometimes it is for our benefit. Sometimes, God forbid, it is for our punishment. We are always on center stage, because we are the protectorate of the Master of the Universe.

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If They Were Wise

Ha'azinu (Deuteronomy 32)

Sep 12, 2021

by **Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski**

If They Were Wise

"Were they wise they would comprehend this, they would discern it from their end" (Deut. 32:29).

No one wants to contemplate their end. Most people act as if they were going to live forever. It has been quipped that we live as if we will never die, and we die as if we never lived. This is a denial of reality, and one cannot possibly have an optimum adjustment to life if one denies reality.

We may verbalize an awareness of our mortality, but our actions betray our feelings. How different our behavior would be if we had an emotional grasp of our mortality.

Both as a rabbi and as a physician, I have attended people in the last days of life when their denial had broken down and they felt that their lives were coming to an end. Many have said, "If I had to do it over again, I would have spent more time with my children. I wish I had gotten to know them better." No one has ever said, "My one regret is that I did not spend more time at the office."

Why is it that this wisdom often comes when one can no longer put it to use?

But that is the irony of life: Our wisdom comes too late.

In my rehabilitation center, adolescents are admitted for treatment of alcoholism and drug addiction. When an adult patient sees a youngster being admitted, he may say, "I wish I had been that lucky, to have been treated for my addiction when I was 15. Here I am at 49, having gone through two unsuccessful marriages and having no contact with my children from either marriage. Everything I could have had in life was lost as a result of my drinking. I have no family, no home, no job."

I suggest to this man, "Why don't you speak with this youngster and tell him how fortunate he is to have an opportunity to overcome his addiction?"

A bit later this patient says, "I tried to talk to the kid, but he won't listen. He's here because the judge ordered him here. He's going to go back out and get high. But I wasn't any different than that kid. I didn't listen to people who told me that alcohol was going to destroy me."

If only we were wise! Moses says that if we were wise, we would contemplate our end when we were young. We would then live so that we would not have anything to regret when we near our end.

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Weekly Parsha HAAZINU 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

These last chapters of the Torah, culminating in this week's reading, are all a very serious and have an almost fearsome quality and tone. Heaven and earth are called upon to be the ultimate witnesses regarding the covenant that the Lord has made with Israel for all time. Rashi points out to us that human witnesses and even historical tradition within families, tribes and other groups are insufficient to uphold the veracity of the covenant between God and Israel. Human beings, by their very natures, can only see things superficially, and remember things selectively and often with a bias and/or agenda.

This is not the case with nature that always does the will of the creator and has no independent opinion or understanding of events on its own. We will see later in Jewish history that the prophet Isaiah will also invoke Heaven and earth in repeating the outlines of the covenant, justifying the rewards and punishment that observance or disregarding the covenant always brings with it.

The concept that nature itself, with all its wonders, unpredictability, and beauty, is itself the greatest source of testimony regarding the covenant between God and Israel. It is one of the truly unique ideas and interpretations that Moshe teaches us in this final part of his valedictory oration the Jewish people.

Heaven and earth are eternal in this world and have fixed laws and patterns that are to never be altered. So too, is the covenant between God and Israel. It also is unchangeable, reliable, consistent, and predictable, and serves as an example and witness to the covenant that has bound us for millennia and remains in force in our current world as well.

The rabbis of the Talmud have often used nature and its attendant animal world as a source of instruction as to how human life should be conducted.

The Talmud tells us that we could learn cleanliness from the feline species, monogamy from the ant, and other such values that are present in the great natural world that we inhabit. Nature in the world that surrounds us is one of wonder and inspiration, but at the very same time, one of possible danger and trepidation.

Volcanoes and earthquakes are also present when we view the beauty and inspiration that snow peak mountain ranges present before us. If one stands in the shadow of a great, tall mountain, every human being experiences the trepidation that the gigantic rock formation provokes.

So, too, is the nature of the covenant between God and Israel. It is a thing of wonder and beauty, of soaring visions, rich in mystery and inspiration. It invokes within us a sense of wonderment. But it also awakens within us the fear and anxiety that make our lives uncertain and bestows upon us feelings of danger. Our only choice is to observe the covenant and to realize that, in so doing, we guarantee our eternity in partnership with the natural world in which we live.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Haazinu (Deuteronomy 32:1-32:52)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – The very joyous and ritually rich festival of Sukkot comes at the heels of Yom Kippur, the Day of Forgiveness and Purity. Now that, hopefully, we have been forgiven for our transgressions, we begin afresh with a clean slate. It is certainly a wonderful feeling to start off the new year with joyous days of familial and communal togetherness. We celebrate by eating our meals in colorfully decorated booths (sukkot) which remind us of God's protection in the desert. And our prayers in the synagogue are punctuated by the waving of the Four Species through which we thank God for His agricultural bounty.

From this description, it would seem that the emphasis is on religious ritual connecting God and Israel. However, the great legalist-philosopher Maimonides makes the following comment in his Laws of Festivals (6: 18): When a person eats and drinks in celebration of a holiday, he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard (or sukka) and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is not indulging in rejoicing associated with a mitzvah, but rather the rejoicing of his gut.

And with regard to such a person the verse, (Hoshea 9:4) is applied: "Their sacrifices will be like the bread of mourners, all that partake thereof shall become impure, for they kept their bread for themselves alone." This happiness is a disgrace for them, as implied by the verse (Malachi 2:3): "I will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your festival celebrations." The Four Species are symbolically described by the Sages of the Midrash as representing four types of Jews: the "Etrog Jew" is both learned and filled with good deeds; the "Lulav Jew" has learning but no good deeds; the "Myrtle Jew" has good deeds but no learning and the "Willow-branch Jew" has neither learning nor good deeds. We are commanded to bind these four together, in order to remind us that a Jewish community consists of many types of Jews all of whom must be accepted and lovingly included within our Jewish community. Hence, a festival which superficially seems to be oriented solely in the direction of religious ritual actually expresses important lessons in human relationships.

To this end, I would like to relate a story. Reb Aryeh Levin, of sacred memory, was renowned as a righteous person of Jerusalem. He was known for his punctilious observance of each of the ritual commandments and his overwhelming compassion for every human being. Two days before the advent of the Festival of Sukkot, he went to the Geula district of Jerusalem to choose his Four Species. Immediately, word spread that the great tzaddik Reb Aryeh was standing in front of a long table in the street selecting his species. A large crowd gathered around him, after all, the etrog (citron) is referred to in the Bible as a beautiful fruit (eitz hadar), and since we are enjoined to "beautify the commandments", observant Jews are especially careful in purchasing a most beautiful and outstanding etrog. Everyone was interested in observing which criteria the great tzaddik would use in choosing his etrog. To the amazement of the crowd, however, Reb Aryeh looked at one etrog and put it down, picked up a second, examined it, and then went back to the first and purchased it together with his three other species. The entire transaction took less than 5 minutes. The crowd, rather disappointed, rapidly dispersed imagining that the great rabbi had a very pressing appointment.

One person decided to follow Reb Aryeh to see exactly where he was going. What could be more important than choosing an etrog the day before Sukkot? this Jerusalemite thought to himself. Rav Levin walked into an old age home. The individual following him, waited outside and 90 minutes later the great Sage exited. The Jerusalemite approached him "Revered Rabbi", he said. "Please don't think me impudent, but I am anxious to learn a point of Torah, and therefore, I am asking the question." The great commandment of Sukkot include the waving of a beautiful etrog. I am certain that visiting the elderly individual or individuals in the Old Age home is also an important mitzvah, but they will be in the Old Age Home during the Festival of Sukkot as well as after it. The purchase of the etrog is a once a year opportunity. I would have expected the revered rabbi to have spent a little more time in choosing the etrog."

Rav Levin took the questioner's hand in his and smiled lovingly "My dear friend", he said. "There are two mitzvot which the Torah employs the term hidur, (beautification), one is: the mitzvah of a beautiful etrog (pri etz hadar), (Leviticus 23: 40) and the second is beautifully honoring the face of the aged – (vehadarta pnei zaken) (Leviticus 19:32). However, the etrog is an object and the aged individual is a subject, a human being and not a fruit. Hence, I believe one must spend much more time in beautifying the commandment relating to the human being than beautifying the commandment relating to a fruit.

Shabbat Shalom!

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 blogs.timesofisrael.com
 Haazinu: Sky, Earth and the Four Winds
 Ben-Tzion Spitz

A handful of pine-seed will cover mountains with the green majesty of forests. I too will set my face to the wind and throw my handful of seed on high. - Fiona Macleod

The penultimate Torah reading is a song. The Song of Haazinu. It is prophetic, poetic, and often challenging to decipher. It hints at what the future will bring, what will happen to the people of Israel at the end of days and throughout their long journey, including rewards and punishments. The format, structure, and content of the Song of Haazinu are meant to stand out and to be taken to heart. The following is how it starts:

*"Give ear, O heavens, let me speak;
 Let the earth hear the words I utter!
 May my discourse come down as the rain,
 My speech distill as the dew,
 Like showers on young growth,
 Like droplets on the grass."*

The first two phrases are relatively straightforward, calling on the heavens and the earth to bear witness to the following song. However, the next four lines seem to repeat in different variations the theme of rain or water falling on the ground.

The Bechor Shor on Deuteronomy 32:2 explains that it's a continuation of the first two phrases and that Moses is calling on additional witnesses to this song besides the heavens and the earth. He is calling upon the four winds to also bear witness. He explains the connection to each wind as follows:

"May my discourse come down as the rain," refers to the West Wind which comes from the nape of the world and normally brings rain.

"My speech distill as the dew," refers to the North Wind which is as pleasant as dew (in Israel).

"Like showers on young growth," is the South Wind which is as stormy as thundershowers.

"Like droplets on the grass," is the East Wind that disperses seed and grows the vegetation.

Together, the sky, the earth and the four winds are witnesses for this song, part of the covenant between God and Israel. They are more than just witnesses; they are the ones that will be the instruments of God's punishments or rewards to us. They will withhold rain, sustenance and the basics of life if we aren't deserving. They will bless us with bounty, health and sustenance if we're deserving.

May we always be on the side of blessings.

Gmar Chatima Tova and Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To and their dedicated staff for taking such great care of my dad, Shlomo Eliezer ben Yetta.

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Ha'azinu

פרשת האזינו תשפ"א

האזינו השמים ואדברה ותשמע הארץ אמרי פי

Give ear, O' Heavens, and I will speak; and may the earth hear the words of my mouth. (32:1)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* is characterized as the *anav mikol adam*, most humble man on earth. Thus, it appears audacious and out of character for him to make a declaration asking heaven and earth to listen to him. This is inconsistent with his humility. The *Kotzker Rebbe*, זל, explains that, indeed, one who is by nature humble does not speak and certainly does not call attention to himself. Therefore, when such an unpretentious person makes a declaration, it is heard. Such an individual who never speaks may posit that he has merited (by being silent thus far) that he should now be listened to.

Indeed, this is a practical concept. No one really listens to someone who lords over him. He is always talking about himself, how much better he is than everyone, his exploits and achievements. They know what he will say, so why bother listening? Let him talk. One who is humble does not speak, does not call attention to himself, never makes demands. Therefore, when he does raise his voice, he garners everyone's attention. Moshe waited until the end of the Torah, to the end his life, to have his "say." Interesting, that it was in the form of a *shirah*, song.

הלל' תגמלו זאת עם נבל ולא חכם?

Is it to Hashem that you do this, O vile and unwise people? (32:6)

Rashi defines *naval* as vile as a result of our lack of gratitude to Hashem Who has done everything for us. An ingrate is both an abominable person and unwise, because, when people see his lack of human decency, they will distance themselves from him. *Targum Onkeles* offers a novel exposition in which he translates *am naval* as *ama d'kablu Oraysa*, the nation that received the Torah. This translation begs elucidation. Why should the nation that accepted the Torah be described as *naval* (which is normally defined as abomination or another uncomplimentary term)? *Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita*, offers an innovative rendering of *naval*, which he applies to *Targum Onkeles'* exposition.

The *Midrash Rabbah (Bereishis 17:5)* states: *Shloshah novlos hein*; there are three offshoots: the offshoot of death is sleep; the offshoot of prophesy is a dream; the offshoot of *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, is *Shabbos*. Rabbi Avin adds, "The offshoot of Heavenly light is the sun. The offshoot of Heavenly wisdom is the Torah." In summary, *Chazal* define *novlos/navel* as *dugmah*, example, offshoot, crumb, feint likeness. Sleep is a miniscule example, a mere crumb of death. Likewise, dreaming, *Shabbos*, and *Torah* are smidgeons of something much, much greater. One who seeks a bare semblance of the essence of Heavenly wisdom, let him study Torah. Through *ameilus*, toil, in studying Torah, he will derive somewhat the meaning and depth of Heavenly wisdom.

Thus, we may posit that *naval* here is derived/related to *novlos*. The *pasuk* teaches us that when one considers himself to be a *baal davar*, someone of substance, one to reckon with, distinguished, as the result of the wisdom he derived from studying Torah, this is because he is a member of *am naval*, the nation that received the Torah, which is only a glimmer of the real thing. What does man – even if he is knowledgeable in Torah – have to arrogate about? What right does he have to repay bad for good to his Creator? Whatever wisdom he possesses has been imparted to him from the Torah, which is authored by Hashem, and represents an inkling of Divine Wisdom. So, it is best that he be grateful for what he has and manifest the proper acknowledgement to the true Source of his wisdom.

זכור ימות עולם בינו שנות דור ודור

Remember the days of old/world history, study the generational epochs. (32:7)

Remember the days of old to incorporate their lessons into the present. Traditionally, following a major collective tragedy *Rabbanim yirei Shomayim*, G-d-fearing scholars, have authored *Sefarim* which portray events that occurred as being part of our history and demonstrating Hashem's Divine Hand in conducting these events. When the Jews were expelled from Spain following the *Tach v'Tat* pogroms, this was the case. Following *Churban Europa*, many articles and *sefarim* were written to depict the Divine Hand manipulating events. I write this because the further in time that we are removed from these events, the easier it is to fall into the abyss created by the secular stream who would want us to believe that these were isolated events. These secularists would have us ignore the chain of events, portents and warnings issued by the greatest Torah scholars, and the self-evident Divine imprint on these events, so that we view the cataclysmic destruction of European Jewry (as an example) as if it were no more than the history of one of the ancient nations, with its religious aspect only one of many relevant factors. Thus, it is no wonder that the secularists contend that the Holocaust was not religious persecution, not a prime example of the ugly

head of antisemitism in the guise of Amalakean hatred toward the Jew/Eisav versus Yaakov. They similarly assert that the Jews did not sacrifice themselves in the Name of Hashem, i.e., *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*, giving their lives for their faith.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, asks (The Jewish Observer/translation of a *shmuess, mussar* talk), "Is the term *Shoah* acceptable? The answer is that clearly it is not. The word *shoah* in Hebrew, Holocaust in English, implies an isolated catastrophe, unrelated to anything before or after it, such as an earthquake or tidal wave. As we have seen, this approach is far from the Torah view of Jewish history. The *Churban* of European Jewry is an integral part of our history, and we dare not isolate it and deprive it of the monumental significance it has for us."

The Holocaust was the nadir, the ugly culmination of a long process of persecution and murder that has accompanied us throughout our bleak *galus*, exile. I am not going to point fingers, because we do not do that. We must each focus on our own *avodas ha'kodesh*, service to the Almighty, to better our relationship with Him and with His children – our family of co-religionists. There definitely was reciprocity in this, as well as every other collective tragedy that has befallen us. *Middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure, is Hashem's way of acting with us. It is all about reciprocity. I think the Torah might be alluding to this in the words of the *pasuk, Binu sh'nos dor vador*, which we translate as: "Study the generational epochs." *Sh'nos* also means to review, to go over, or, perhaps, to reciprocate. You do for/to me, I pay back. *Binu sh'nos dor vador*, consider the reciprocity that ensues throughout the generations, or as the *Kelmer Maggid, zl*, foreshadowed seventy years prior to the Nuremburg Laws and Holocaust, "For the sin of the *Shulchan Aruch* (New Code of Jewish Law), innovated by Abraham Geiger, there will arise from Germany a new code of Jewish law against the Jewish People in which it will be stated: The best Jews should be killed!" There is also a positive reciprocity that, when we perform *mitzvos*, Hashem rewards us. This is the true recompense that we seek.

זכור ימות עולם בינו שנות דור ודור

Remember the days of old/world history, study the generational epochs. (32:7)

A number of years back, during the recession that had a major impact on the financial markets and resulted in devastating blows on the finances of many *bonei Torah*, the question was posed to *Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl*: Why? These were *bonei Torah* who had done well financially and, being exemplary *bonei Torah*, they used the profits of their investments well. They supported *yeshivos* and promoted all forms of Torah *chinuch*. Their money was used to fund *chesed* organizations that helped individuals in need. Thus, it came as a surprise when their fortunes suffered a reversal. Why did Hashem take their bounty when it could have been used wisely to help those in need?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* applied this question to *Reb Baruch Ber Zeldovich* and his brother-in-law, *Reb Ber Pinnes*, who were two of the greatest *baalei tzedakah*, philanthropists, in Russia during the nineteenth century. They supported most of the *yeshivos* and *chesed* organizations in Russia. They never said "no" to any *tzedakah* request. Then *Reb Baruch* went bankrupt, which also took a toll on his brother-in-law, who partnered with him in most of their businesses. At this point, *Reb Baruch* went to *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, of Brisk, and asked, "Why?" He had used his G-d-given money properly, using most of it to support and sustain Torah institutions and Torah scholars. Why was it decreed on him from Heaven that he should lose it all?

Rav Chaim replied with a parable. A father sent his son away to a school of higher learning, so that he would complete a specific course of study. After the son successfully completed the course, his father sent him to take a different course in another department. Likewise, when a person completes his mission in life successfully and does so in record time, Hashem gives him another mission to fulfill. "Until now, your mission was to serve Hashem amid wealth. You executed your mission admirably. Now Hashem wants you to serve Him amid abject poverty."

The *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that while this explanation clarifies somewhat why the individual suffers a reversal of his fortunes, it does not explain why large segments of Jews who did well and acted appropriately should suffer the traumatic effects of a recession. He looks to *Sforno's* commentary to the above *pasuk* (*z'chor yemos olam*) as a foundation upon which we can lend some understanding concerning world events and their impact on our lives.

Sforno explains that by relating the events of the past and the future, the Torah seeks to tell us that initially Hashem intended to attain the goal and purpose of Creation via humankind. When that did not succeed, he elevated and focused only on *Klal Yisrael*. First, it was *Adam HaRishon*, who fared well until he sinned. The generation that followed did not fare much better. Thus, Hashem had to punish the generation of the Flood and deal with the generation of the Dispersal. Hashem then chose the Patriarchs and their progeny to fulfill His goals for the world. The Jewish People survived Pharaoh, were liberated and received the Torah. It appeared that Hashem's plan for a *mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh*, a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation, was on target to be realized when the sin of the Golden Calf occurred. Hashem sought to achieve His goal with the next generation, who would enter *Eretz Yisrael* and glorify His Name. Sadly, Yeshurun waxed fat and rebelled. The nation lost their Temples and required exile to expiate their sins, test their mettle and hopefully then realize Hashem's goal for a *mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh*. So, here we are now in midst of *galus*, exile, from which we will hopefully emerge one day soon as the finished product of Hashem's Divine Plan for the world.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* asks why we have been blessed with such material bounty practically unheard of throughout our checkered history. Clearly, when we were in *Eretz Yisrael* and blessed with material excess, it did not spare us from exile. We had it, and we lost it. Why should we have another "shot" at it? He explains that following all of the troubles, travails and persecutions that we have endured, especially after the Second World War and the Holocaust, we should have learned that the bounty with which we have been blessed was for a purpose. Apparently, we did not. Thus, the test continues, and the *galus* which has been our backdrop for two thousand years continues, until that glorious day when we will finally fulfill Hashem's goal and pass the ultimate test with flying colors.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* continues along those lines and explains the benefit of *yesurim*, troubles and afflictions. By understanding how they benefit us, we are better attuned to deal with them and benefit from their expiatory process. He quotes *Horav Avraham Grodzensky, zl*, who cites the dialogue in the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 101a when Rabbi Eliezer lay bedridden. He was visited by his students, of which Rabbi Akiva was primary. Rabbi Eliezer said that Hashem was angry with him, so He had caused him to suffer. His students began to weep for him, while Rabbi Akiva smiled. They asked Rabbi Akiva why his reaction to their *Rebbe's* pain was mirthful. He countered by asking why their response was mournful. They said, "How can we not weep when the *Sefer Torah* (their revered *Rebbe*, who embodied Torah at its apex) is in such pain. Rabbi Akiva countered, "This is why I smile. When I see that *Rebbe's* wine does not sour, his flax does not become ruined, his oil does not spoil, his honey does not decompose, I have reason to fear that he has received his future reward in this world. Now, when I see him suffering, I know that he has a glorious reward waiting for him in the World-to-Come."

We see from here that when everything goes our way, when material bounty is ours and excess becomes our accepted way of life, we have to think twice: Is Hashem giving it all to me now, in this temporary world, in which nothing endures? Life should not be about struggle, but a life without struggle makes one wonder. No one is perfect. We all make mistakes. No one acts maliciously with intent to rebel. We just forget that we are here for a purpose. *Yesurim* are Hashem's manner of reminding us.

Life has its (to the mortal eye) negative moments, with some of us experiencing more than others. Why one person, one family, seems to endure a greater portion of adversity goes beyond our level of comprehension. With our limited vision and awareness, some areas of the spiritual dimension

elude us. How one deals with, how one addresses the varied moments of travail and adversity to which he is subjected, however, makes a world of difference. *Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl*, offers a powerful, inspiring analogy that should help us to deal with these circumstances, if and when they occur.

A talented young child was being instructed in art. Under his mentor's tutelage, the child had painted an impressive landscape. It had taken him some time, but the boy was a perfectionist who demanded that his painting be flawless. As he was admiring his finished work, he accidentally knocked over a bottle of paint and a large drop of paint landed squarely in the middle of his landscape. The boy was devastated. All of that work was for nothing. He could not bear to look at what had once been his masterpiece.

When his teacher saw how crushed he was, he told him to sit down, and said, "Let us look at this together and see if we cannot ameliorate the problem. We have before us a perfect portrait of a landscape, and, right in the middle, we have the intrusion of a paint spot. All you have to do is paint a head and a beak with eyes, add wings and feet, and you now have a beautiful bird admiring the magnificent landscape." A powerful analogy that teaches us an important lesson: With calm and positive thinking it is possible to transform disaster into opportunity.

I conclude with an inspiring story. In his short life, Moischele had experienced more trauma than most people experience in a lifetime. His father had been killed in an automobile accident when Moischele was just a toddler, and his mother became ill two years ago. She fought valiantly, and Moischele prayed with all his heart that she should be cured, but it was not meant to be. As he walked back from his mother's funeral, accompanied by his *rebbe*, the dam that had heretofore kept his emotions in check burst, and Moischele broke down. His *rebbe* also wept, because he understood what this young boy was now up against. He prayed that he would have the right words to say that would provide some sort of comfort to him.

"Do you see that construction site across the street? A group of contractors purchased that five-story building. They are knocking it down and are planning to build a twenty-story apartment complex in its place. If an unknowing person would walk by and see them knocking down a perfectly fine building, he would surely wonder why they were doing this. The answer is simple: They want to build a larger building. If this is the case, why not simply add fifteen stories to the original building? The answer is: The taller the building, the deeper and stronger must be its foundation.

"Likewise with you, Moischele. Hashem has put you under incredible pressure, as you have lost both your parents and theoretically are alone in the world. (He did have elderly, loving grandparents.) Hashem obviously is preparing your foundation for extraordinary greatness. He is putting you through very difficult travail in order to temper and strengthen your faith in Him."

"Why me? Why does He not choose someone else for this mission?"

"That is a good question, Moischele. A similar question can be asked concerning why the contractors must knock down this building. Why can they not simply go to the outskirts of the city and choose an empty lot and build there? The answer is simple: This is the center of town, the *mercaz*, where everything happens. People want to live here, not on the outskirts. To build here makes the most sense and will incur the greatest profit. Likewise, Hashem sees something special in you, Moischele. This is why He is preparing your spiritual foundation to achieve greatness." Hashem has a plan. It is neither for us to understand, nor is it for us to conclude. We ask no questions, because the chances are we will probably not grasp the answers.

כהנחל עליון גוים בהפרידו בני אדם יצב גבלת עמים למספר בני ישראל

When the Most High gave the nations their portions, when He separated the children of man, He set the borders of nations according to the number of Bnei Yisrael. (32:8)

Following the Flood that devastated the world, the few survivors rebuilt, and all the people who lived together sinned once again by creating the Tower of Babel. Hashem dispersed and divided them into seventy nations, with seventy distinct languages corresponding to the number of souls that

had descended together with Yaakov Avinu to Egypt. The Torah is conveying the message that when the nations sinned again, they forfeited their chance to be the human bearers of Hashem's mission for humanity. Instead, Hashem selected *Klal Yisrael* to replace the larger, more populous nations with the much smaller, but more distinct and holy *Klal Yisrael*. This means that as we are the bearers of His mission to the world, history will work in consonance with our needs. It, therefore, stands to reason that in all our subsequent wanderings/travels among the (seventy) nations of the world, wherever we may be, the potential to live a Torah life is preordained and will thus be available to us.

To underscore this idea, the *Bostoner Rebbe*, *zl*, relates how one day in the late 1970's a Harvard doctoral candidate sent him an urgent cable. Apparently, his brother and sister-in-law were involved in a six-month engineering project in Nepal. They wanted guidance on how to construct their own personal *mikvah*! Obviously, they were unaware that building a *mikvah*, even for someone with an advanced engineering degree, is not a simple task. Furthermore, it was not an endeavor that had the likelihood of being completed within their time frame.

The *Rebbe* sent someone to Harvard's main research library with the task of poring through atlases to locate a river near Katmandu (where they were staying) that met the specific *halachic* criteria for immersion. This meant identifying the river's sources, specifically to determine how much was spring water and how much was rain water. (The waters of a *mikvah* must gather together naturally, thus obviating tap water. They must be derived either from spring water or rain water, which may then be combined with tap water. If spring water is used, it may be flowing. If, however, rain water is used, it must be stationary.)

The student returned with a plethora of information concerning Nepalese geography, and they soon discovered a *halachically* appropriate river near their residence. Luckily, the Katmandu Valley enjoys nice weather throughout most of the year. Their problem was solved. Hashem had prepared the opportunity for a Jew to observe all the strictures of *halachah*, even in the distant Himalayan mountains.

Va'ani Tefillah

אלקי נצור לשוני מרע - *Elokai, netzor leshoni mei'ra*. G-d, guard my tongue from evil.

When one takes a common-sensical approach toward understanding the sin of *lashon hora*, evil/slandering speech, he arrives at the conclusion that avoiding speaking *lashon hora* is a pipe dream. There is absolutely no way to circumvent this sin unless one never thinks evil of another person. If the thought remains embedded in his mind, it will at some moment "escape." One will become angry at the other fellow, or he will convince himself that it is his responsibility to inform others of the dangers of a relationship with this man. At some point, the *lashon hora* that he has kept sequestered in his mind will find its exit from his mouth.

Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl, posits that the only manner in which one can self-protect against *lashon hora* is by actually fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *V'ahava l'reicha kamocho*; "Love your fellow as (you love) yourself." Just as I do not want someone to harbor any complaints against me, so, too, should I not harbor any misgivings towards him. One who does not actually fulfill the *mitzvah* creates a *pirud*, separation, between himself and others. One who separates himself even from one Jew is actually separating himself from the entire nation, since we are all part of a chain; remove one link and the chain is broken. In conclusion: One who does not love will speak evil, thus severing his relationship with *Am Yisrael*.

זכר נשמת
רחל לאה בת ר' נח ע"ה
פריידיא בת ר' נח ע"ה
שרה אסתר בת ר' נח ע"ה
נספו במחנות ההסגר בשנות הוועם י"ג תשרי תש"ג

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

TORAH STUDIES: Parshat Haazinu

From Chabad.org <learntorah@chabad.org> Ha-azinu

Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

The Sidra of Ha-azinu begins with Moses' great oration, "Give ear, ye heavens... and let the earth hear." The Midrash, with its usual sensitivity to the nuances of language, notes that Moses seems to be talking in terms of intimacy towards the heavens, and of distance towards the earth. There is an almost exactly opposite verse in Isaiah, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth," in which Isaiah expresses closeness to earth and distance from heaven. Which path is the Jew to follow? Is he to strive towards heaven and keep himself aloof from worldly events? Or is he, like Isaiah, to find his spiritual home in the things of the earth? And what bearing does this dilemma have on the time in which the Sidra is usually read, the Ten Days of Repentance, and the days immediately following Yom Kippur, the supreme moments of self-examination in the Jewish year?

1. Words of Closeness and Distance

The Midrash¹ tells us that Moses was "close to heaven" and "far from the earth," and this is why he said, "Give ear, ye heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth." "Give ear" speaks in the tone of closeness, "let the earth hear" bears the accent of distance.

In the same way, the Midrash says that Isaiah was "far from the heavens... and close to the earth," for he said, in exact opposition to Moses, "Hear O heavens, and give ear, O earth."²

But this opposition is a surprising one. "Torah" means "teaching," and all its words are words of instruction for every Jew.³ When Moses said, "Give ear, ye heavens... and let the earth hear" the implication was that every Jew should strive to be close to heaven, and to liberate himself from the constraints of earth. If Isaiah, the greatest of the prophets,⁴ could not reach this, how then can the Torah demand it of every Jew? And, if closeness to heaven is, in fact, within the reach of every Jew through the inspiration of Moses which is "within" every Jew,⁵ why had Isaiah failed to reach this level?

The matter is all the more strange since—as the Midrash⁶ says—Isaiah's words were spoken as a continuation of Moses' address. Speaking as he was under the direct inspiration of Moses, it should have been all the easier for Isaiah to rise to his heights.

We are forced to conclude, then, that Isaiah was not outlining a lower level, but an even higher one, than that of which Moses had spoken. It was in this sense that he was continuing where Moses left off. Reaching upwards to Moses' heights, "close to heaven," he was able to strain to a yet greater achievement, of being "close to earth." And since Isaiah's words, too, are part of the Torah, they form a universal message to the Jew.

We must also realize that, since every teaching of the Torah has a special relevance to the time of the year when it is read,⁷ these words of Moses and their continuation in Isaiah are of particular significance to the time between Rosh Hashanah and Succot, during which they are always read.

2. Days of Weeping

Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the Ari, said,⁸ "Whoever does not shed tears during the Ten Days of Repentance—his soul is imperfect." The simple meaning of this is that during these days G-d is close to every Jew⁹ with, in the Chassidic phrase,¹⁰ "the closeness of the luminary to the spark."

If, even in such a time of grace, a Jew is not moved to the tears of repentance, there is an imperfection in his soul. Nothing wakes it to return to its source. It has moved far indeed from its destiny.

But the Ari suggests, by saying "Whoever does not shed tears," that this applies to every Jew, even to the perfectly righteous. And yet repentance, certainly when accompanied by tears, is about sin, transgression, wrongdoing, of which the righteous man is innocent. How can we expect that he repent, and so much so that there must be some imperfection in his soul if he is not moved to penitential tears?

We could understand the Ari's remark if it referred to the "benoni," the Jew

who has never sinned, even in thought, but who has not yet removed the desire to do wrong, even though it is kept in continual suppression.¹¹ For in him there is always the possibility of sin, and this alone is enough for tears in these supreme days of self-examination.

But the completely righteous, whose nature is unstirred by even the trace of misguided desire, would seem to have no need, no cause for tears.

Humility may lead him to them. Even the great Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai wept and said, “When there are two ways before me, one leading to Paradise, and the other to Gehinnom, and I do not know by which I shall be taken, shall I not weep?”¹² In their fervor, the righteous may mistakenly think themselves unworthy. But why should the Ari suggest not that they can sometimes weep, but that they should? For self-knowledge is a virtue, and it is no duty to think oneself worse than one is.

3. Tears of Joy and Bitterness

The Alter Rebbe explained¹³ that the tears of which the Ari spoke were not tears of bitterness and self-recrimination, but tears like those which Rabbi Akiva shed when he penetrated the secret mysteries of the Torah¹⁴—tears of intense joy.

But these cannot be the only tears which the righteous shed, or it would transpire that the Ari using one word to denote two opposites—the joyous tears of the righteous and the bitter tears of other Jews. The first would express a closeness to G-d, the second a sense of distance.

4. The Spirit Shall Return

The explanation is that teshuvah is not merely repentance, something which comes only where there was sin. It means the return of the soul to its source.¹⁵ “And the spirit shall return to G-d who gave it.”¹⁶

Even the righteous man who serves G-d with love and fear and the totality of his being has not yet reached that stage of complete closeness to Him, which the soul experienced before birth.¹⁷ Earthly existence creates a distance between the soul and G-d which not even righteousness can wholly bridge, and this is the grief of the righteous and the source of his tears. He senses, even in the highest human life, a descent of the soul from its heavenly enthronement. His tears, like those of the ordinary Jew, are born of a consciousness of distance from G-d.

5. Tears of Effacement

But even this answer will not suffice. For the righteous would then be grieving over the inevitable: The fact that bodily existence sets a distance between G-d and the soul. This is a fact that man cannot change. And what man cannot alter, he cannot blame himself for.

If the righteous man were thinking about his own spiritual satisfaction he might feel embittered that birth was a loss to the soul. He might, without feeling guilty, feel aggrieved. But the righteous do not think of themselves. They think instead of the Divine will,¹⁸ which is that their soul should live within the world’s narrow boundaries. Why, then, should they weep over their situation?

Perhaps it might be that the righteous weep because they have not (yet) fulfilled their mission. For the descent of the soul is not an end in itself; it is a means to a yet greater ascent, a complete self-effacement as the soul recognizes its nothingness and the all-embracing reality of G-d. And since the righteous man has some reality in his own eyes,¹⁹ he is not yet at his journey’s end. He still has cause for tears.

And yet, if even the greatest man cannot reach this stage, how can we say he ought to? We cannot demand the impossible.

The truth is that the Jew is a part of G-d. He can rise above the ordinary spiritual possibilities of the world. And he sheds tears at his human limitations, because this is the way to overcome them.

“From my confinement I called upon the L-rd: The L-rd answered me with enlargement.”²⁰ It is the sense that after all the achievements of a righteous life one is still in a “confinement,” that brings about the “enlargement” which is the loss of man’s self-consciousness and his assimilation into the Divine.

6. Oneness With G-d Within the World

This is the significance of the Ten Days of Teshuvah, the time when G-d is at His closest to man, although teshuvah is always important.²¹ For these days not only accord it special favor; they elevate it to a new degree. It becomes more than repentance for sin; it becomes the returning of the soul to G-d, the end of spiritual alienation. This sudden possibility allows man to see his human limitations as no longer inevitable. They can be transcended. And therefore they can be wept over—by every Jew.

When man achieves this self-transcendence, he has made a break-through which is possible only to the soul in its earthly existence. He has become one with the Infinite in the very midst of the finite. He thus reveals that the soul’s union with G-d has no limitations whatsoever, for he has reached union with G-d without forsaking the world. “From my confinement I called upon the L-rd,” and within this body, this narrow world, “the L-rd answered me with enlargement.”

7. The Shofar

This explains the meaning of the shofar blown on Rosh Hashanah. Through the shofar (whose physical shape indicates “confinement” at one end and “enlargement” at the other) we evoke the kingship of G-d. And as the Talmud²² reports, that G-d says, “Recite before Me on Rosh Hashanah verses of kingship, remembrance and the shofar. Kingship—so that you may make Me king over you... and through what? Through the shofar.”

The statement is puzzling, because the natural order would be first to proclaim G-d as our king, and then to obey His decrees.²³ How can we evoke G-d’s desire to be our king through performing one of His decrees, which assumes that He is already our King?

The explanation lies in our prayer before the Shofar is blown: “From my confinement I called upon the L-rd....” Our “confinement” is not simply our sins, but our very existence as beings-in-ourselves, as people who feel that we are separate from G-d, and as long as this is true, we have not admitted G-d as our king. But when we stand in this “confinement” and yet “call upon the L-rd” we reach the very Essence of G-dliness, and bring G-d’s “enlargement” into the heart of human life. This is the making of G-d’s kingship. He is king within the world, not above it.

8. The Confines of the World

and its Enlargement

The relation between the Sidra of Ha-azinu—of Moses’ call and Isaiah’s completion of it—and the Ten Days of Teshuvah (as well as the four days following Yom Kippur²⁴), is now clear.

Throughout the year our religious life is concerned with things of the “earth,” the study of the Torah and the practical performance of the commandments. Even the “duties of the heart” belong to our human personality, our intellect, our temperament.

But during the Ten Days, “the spirit shall return to G-d who gave it.” Every Jew must become aware of the “confinement” which the world represents: Aware to the point of tears. He must “call upon the L-rd,” with a thrust and desire to become one with G-d.

A man is where his will is.²⁵ And by this very act of shedding tears over his “confinement,” he takes himself beyond it. He becomes “close to heaven” and “far from earth.” His overpowering desire is to be “close to heaven”: And that is where he is.

G-d’s response is to “answer me with enlargement,” that is with His presence within the earth, which reveals the true Essence of G-d, as above. The Infinite enters his human habitation. And then he finds G-d “close to the earth” and “far from heaven.”

9. The Lesson of Isaiah

This is true throughout a Jew’s life.

“Heaven” is the Torah, the word of G-d. “Earth” is the commandments, the actions of man.²⁶ Through learning Torah a Jew draws close to G-d.²⁷ Through the commandments, he draws G-d into the world.²⁸

At first, he must be “close to heaven.” Though he must keep the commandments, his heart must be in the study of Torah.

But this is only the first stage. He must come in time to know that “not

learning but doing is the essential thing,”²⁹ for the real task of man is to change the world, to make it G-d’s dwelling.

It needed Isaiah to give us this second stage. For the Torah was received by Moses. But to Isaiah fell the prophecy of the future redemption,³⁰ the time when the world will be G-d’s dwelling-place, when “every form shall know that You have formed it.”³¹ When the form of the world will be fused with the Infinity of G-d.

(Source. Likkutei Sichot, Vol. IX pp. 204-214)

FOOTNOTES

1. Sifri, beginning of Ha-azinu. Cf. Zohar, Ha-azinu, 286b.
2. Isaiah 1:2.
3. Zohar, Part III, 53b.
4. Yalkut, Isaiah, Remez 385.
5. Tanya, Part I, ch. 42.
6. Sifri; Yalkut, Ha-azinu, Remez 942.
7. Cf. Shaloh, beg. Vayeshev. Or Hatorah, beg. Nitzavim.
8. Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar Hashofar, ch. 5.
9. Rosh Hashanah, 18a (explaining Isaiah 56:6). Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah, 2:6.
10. Derech Chayim, 13d; 21b; 91a.
11. Tanya, Part I, chs. 12, 13, etc.
12. Berachot, 28b.
13. Likkutei Torah, Tetze 37d.
14. Midrash Haneelam, Vayera, 98b.
15. Likkutei Torah, beg. Ha-azinu.
16. Ecclesiastes 12:7.
17. Tanya, Part I, ch. 37.
18. Ibid., ch. 10.
19. Ibid., ch. 35.
20. Psalms 118:5.
21. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah, 2:6.
22. Rosh Hashanah, 16a, 34b.
23. Cf. Mechilta and Yalkut Shimoni, Yitro 20:3.
24. Cf. Preface of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Kuntres 97, in Sefer Hamaamarim, 5709.
25. Cf. Likkutei Sichot, Vol. VI, p. 24, note 29.
26. Torah Or, beg. Bereishit; Likkutei Torah, Ha-azinu, 74b.
27. Tanya, Part I, ch. 23. Cf. Ibid., ch. 5.
28. Ibid., ch. 37.
29. Pirkei Avot, 1:17.
30. Cf. Baba Batra, 14b.
31. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayers.