

# *Parshas Haazinu*

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## *1. The Expectation of Man*

The Torah states, **“I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you...”** Rashi explains, “Hashem said to the Jewish people, “You should look at the heaven and the earth which I have created to serve you. Did it ever happen that the sun did not rise in the east and illuminate the world? The earth that I created to serve you – did it ever change its function? Did you ever plant and it did not grow? Did you ever plant wheat and barley grew in its place? If the creations of heaven and earth do not deviate from their function despite the fact that they are not deserving of reward when they function as they were intended to or receive punishment if they should fail, should it not be more so that the Jewish people not deviate from their responsibility because they are deserving of reward and subject to punishment?”

One of the methodologies given at Sinai as an approach to interpret the Torah is known as *kal v'chomer*. This logical principle states, for example, if one is deserving of reward for doing less, how much more so is one deserving for doing more (minimally the same degree of reward). To give the Jewish people a greater understanding of their responsibility, Moshe uses heaven and earth as the model to establish the *kal v'chomer* to give them an appreciation of the value of their actions. It seems that the function of heaven and earth is not comparable to the function of a human being. Heaven and earth are not “beings” that have the ability to choose. Therefore, they perform the function for which they were created. However, the human being who is a creature of choice continuously contends with an inclination which makes his choice difficult. If so, there is no basis for the *kal v'chomer*. Since the Torah communicates this as a valid *kal v'chomer* we must understand why it is the case.

Rambam states in Hilchos Yisodei HaTorah that *malachim* (angels) who were created to carry out the Will of G-d are not spiritual robots. An angel is a spiritual being who does not deviate from carrying out the Will of G-d because it recognizes and understands who Hashem is. Thus, the angel is not the spiritual robot.

We find on the third day of creation that Hashem decreed, “Let the earth give forth fruit trees producing fruit.” Meaning that not only should the fruit of the tree be edible, but even the tree itself should be edible. However, G-d’s Command only brought about a tree which was itself inedible but that produced edible fruits. For some unknown reason, the angel, who is the spiritual being, who carries out the agency of Hashem, did not follow the order as it was given. Thus the result was not as perfect as G-d had wanted it to be. Now that we understand that the function of the angel is based on its own understanding of G-d, we are now able to appreciate the *kal v'chomer* which is being drawn by the Torah

(from heaven and earth to the behavior of the human being). Meaning – although the angel is not deserving of reward or punishment it does not deviate from His Will because it is cognizant of the Will of Hashem. The Jew who is subject to reward and punishment should definitely be cognizant of His Will because if not, he will be held culpable for its violation or deserving of reward for its fulfillment. The only reason a Jew fails is because of his lack of cognizance.

The function of the evil inclination is to distract and overwhelm the Jew so he will not appreciate the Will of Hashem. He will lose perspective regarding his behavior. If one would continuously reflect on the consequences of his actions – for the positive or negative – then he would be no different than the angel. In fact the Jew would be even more inclined than the angel to do the Will of G-d because he is eligible for reward while the angel is not.

The Gemara in Tractate Sukkah states, “I (Hashem) created the evil inclination, and the Torah as its antidote.” The Torah is needed to give one the clarity to appreciate the consequences of his actions. It is when one achieves clarity through Torah study that he is able to subdue the evil inclination.

The Torah tells us that at the end of time Hashem will circumcise our hearts and the hearts of our children. Sforno explains this to mean, “Hashem will remove all confusion from our hearts. He will open our eyes and thus be removed from the pitfalls of life.” One will have the clarity to want to do “good” because the state of confusion in which we exist will be lifted. In order not to have this happen, one only has to realize the invaluable benefit of doing the Will of G-d and the grave consequences that result from deviating and not following His Will.

The Gemara in *Tractate Taanis* tells us that a Torah Sage angers because the fire of Torah is within him. As the verse states, “Are not My Words like fire...” Rashi explains that the Torah contained within the Sage causes him to become angry. The Torah itself gives one an appreciation and depth of understanding of the wrong that is being perpetrated. However others who are not advanced in their Torah knowledge do not have the capacity to sense the wrong in what is contrary to the Torah.

It is only by gaining clarity that one can attain a semblance of the understanding of an angel. Thus, the comparison that is drawn by the Torah between the Jew and the angel is valid.

## ***2. The Success of the Evil is a Confirmation of G-d's Justice***

The Torah states in the Portion of Haazinu, **“Yeshurun became fat and kicked. You became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent – and it deserted G-d its maker, and was contemptuous of the Rock of its salvation.”** Sforno explains “Yeshurun became fat and kicked” is referring to the Jewish people who are called “Yeshurun” because they are the congregation of those who uphold the Torah and have the ability to delve into its depth. He explains, “Just as the animal who kicks the owner who feeds it, so too the Jewish people shun (kick) Hashem who provides them with their sustenance and blessing. How did this happen? You, the Jewish people, who are “Yeshurun” who are able to delve and understand the Torah, you have turned to all of the material desires and through them have become thickened (lost your sensitivity) to unadulterated truth.” If the Jewish people become overly involved and immersed in the material they lose their sensitivity to truth; thus, they bolt from Hashem.

Moshe refers to Hashem as “the Rock whose action is perfect.” Meaning, even when one is punished and it seems that he is being treated unjustly by G-d, he must understand that G-d is Perfect and His Judgment is Perfect. Moshe continues and states, “All His ways are Just.” The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains this by citing the Midrash Tehillim, which cites the words of King David who rejoiced when he witnessed evil being rewarded. “Why did he rejoice? It is because he understood – if this is the way Hashem treats those who transgress His Will, how much more will He reward those who adhere to His Will.” How do we understand this?

We can explain it with the concept of *rasha v'tov lo* – an evil person (who despite his evil) experiences good fortune and *tzaddik v'ra lo* – a righteous person (who despite his devoutness) experiences misfortune. If one sees an evil person with good fortune while the righteous person is experiencing difficulty, one may perceive this wrongly and take a position that Hashem is not being Just. Thus, Moshe states, “All of His ways are Just.” How do we put this into perspective?

There is no individual who is completely evil or completely good. Although the vast majority of one's deeds may be evil, if he had done even the minutest act of kindness (or other righteous deed), he is deserving of reward. Hashem does not withhold the rightful reward from any living creature. Thus, the *rasha* who is deserving of reward will receive it in a material context. Therefore, if G-d does not deny reward to the evil for even the minutest act of righteousness, how much more so will He bestow reward on the *tzaddik* who is so deserving. It is important to note that the *rasha* receives his reward in the physical context while the *tzaddik* receives his reward in a spiritual context – which is the world to come. Thus, when one sees a *tzaddik* experiencing misfortune and a *rasha* experiencing exceptional success in his life, one should understand that the *rasha* is being rewarded for the few good deeds that he had performed. This is the reason King David rejoiced when he saw the evil being rewarded.

If a Jew lives a life, which is focused on materialism and this becomes his value system, then his ability to comprehend and appreciate G-d's Justice becomes impaired. He will not be able to understand why the *rasha*, despite his evil ways, deserves material

success while the tzaddik suffers.

### ***3. Shofar, Entering into the Inner Sanctum of G-d***

Rambam states in Hilchos Teshuvah, “Although the obligation of blowing of the Shofar is a Divine Decree in the Torah, simultaneously the blowing of the Shofar is also an allusion (*remez*).” The message that the Shofar conveys is – all those who are asleep or in a deep slumber should awaken. They should introspect and reflect on their past behavior and do teshuvah (repent). Part of the teshuvah process is to remember one’s Creator. Those who are in a slumber have forgotten the truth because they are consumed with the vanities of time. They occupy themselves completely with pursuits of vanity and emptiness, which have no value. Gaze upon your souls and better yourselves and abandon your evil ways and improper thoughts.”

When hearing the blowing of the Shofar, it touches and affects a person’s spirituality to awaken and extricate himself from the material state of mind. Rambam suggests that the way one could maintain a level of spiritual cognizance throughout the year is to think of one’s self in the balance. He should consider his standing as one with 50% good deeds and 50% negative – a borderline case. He should regard his situation as one that can be swayed to the positive or to the negative by one act. If he were to sin then he would sway himself to the negative and bring destruction upon himself and the world. Conversely if he performs a mitzvah he will sway himself to the positive thus saving himself and existence.

If a non-Jew or one who is not obligated in the mitzvah of Shofar, (such as a minor), were to blow, would it have the same “awakening” affect on those who hear its sound? Since the blast has no halachic (legal) value, does it touch upon one’s spirituality to bring about this awakening? It is not the sound of the horn that causes the spiritual awakening but rather the “*kol Shofar*” (the sound of the Shofar) within the halachic context of fulfilling one’s obligation. Why is this the case?

The Mishna in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that a Shofar cannot be made from the horn of a cow. The Mishna gives two reasons for this. The first reason is that the horn of a cow is referred to as “*keren*” and not “*Shofar*.” Secondly, there is a principle “*Ein kateigor naaseh sanheigor* - that a prosecutor cannot be an advocate.” The horn of the cow represents the Golden Calf (*Chet Ha’Agle*) with which the Jews sinned at Sinai. Anything which has relevance to the Golden Calf must be avoided at a time when we are in need of an advocate. Any derivative of the cow or gold arouses the most serious level of prosecution against the Jewish people.

On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol (the High Priest) officiated with two sets of vestments. He would wear the golden vestments when he performed the service in the outer sanctuary of the Temple. However, when he performed the service that was particular to Yom Kippur, which required him to enter the Holy of Holies, he wore white vestments. He was not permitted to wear the golden vestments for the Yom Kippur service because he had to enter the Holy of Holies (the location of the Shechina – the Divine Presence) to atone for the Jewish People. If he had worn gold, he could not have

functioned in the capacity of an advocate because gold arouses prosecution.

The Gemara asks, since the principle “a prosecutor cannot be an advocate” only has relevance within the context of the Holy of Holies – the location of the Divine Presence- then why is it that one cannot utilize the horn of a cow to fulfill the mitzvah of Shofar since the mitzvah is fulfilled outside of the Holy of Holies?

The Gemara answers that when one blows the Shofar it is considered as if he is standing inside the Holy of Holies. The blowing of the Shofar brings about an intimacy between the Jew and G-d that is the equivalent of standing in the Holy of Holies. Thus, at this moment, the prosecutor cannot be an advocate (the cow horn cannot be used).

We say in the Amidah of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that all evil will be vanquished. It is because Hashem will enter into existence. Since evil cannot coexist within context of His Presence it will be eliminated. On Rosh Hashanah when we blow the Shofar, we reach a level of closeness with G-d that is similar to being in the Holy of Holies. Thus, when the Shofar is blown, all spiritual impurity that causes insensitivity to spirituality (slumber/sleep) dissipates.

The mitzvah is to “hear the sound of the Shofar” not to blow the Shofar. This is because hearing the sound of the Shofar within a halachic context penetrates the heart of those who are obligated in the mitzvah and awakens them from the slumber that is brought on by the material existence.

#### ***4. The Worth of Every Jew***

The Torah states, “**When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d.**” Sforno explains that “calling the Name of Hashem” is referring to tefillah (prayer). He explains that Moshe was praying for the ultimate ingathering of the exile and that G-d should awaken His children as the eagle awakens its offspring in their nest. Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that when the eagle awakens its young it does so in a manner that does not startle them. It flutters its wings in order to alert its young so that they should awaken, just as the signs of the coming of Moshiach are intended to awaken the Jew.

The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah explains that the Jewish people pass before Hashem as sheep pass through a narrow opening to be counted singularly for the sake of tithing. When one owns a flock or a herd, one has an obligation to designate every tenth animal as *maaser beheima* (*the tenth animal, which takes on a consecrated status*). As each animal exited through a narrow opening, one would count it and paint a red marking on the tenth animal – thus designating it as *maaser*. Similarly, the Jewish people pass before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah.

Another interpretation of the Mishna, which is stated in the Gemara is that on the Day of Judgment, the Jewish people are compared to the soldiers in the army of King David. Reb Yisroel Salanter z'tl explains that each interpretation of the Mishna addresses another level of judgment on Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah there are two judgments given by Hashem. One is a judgment based on one's individual performance. The other judgment is based on one's value vis-à-vis the Jewish people as a whole. It is possible that even if one had failed in his personal obligations as a Jew (and is undeserving of a favorable judgment), because he is essential to the Jewish community he will be receive a favorable judgment for "life and success." The more an individual is needed by others, the greater the likelihood that he would be judged favorably despite his personal lack of merit.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that each of the three tefillos (Amidahs) that we recite each day correspond to the tefillos of Patriarchs. Shacharis (morning prayer) corresponds to the prayer of Avraham. Mincha (afternoon prayer) corresponds to Yitzchak and Arvis (evening prayer) corresponds to Yaakov. The Gemara asks – where is it alluded to that Yitzchak prayed the tefillah of Mincha? The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us based on the verse, "Yitzchak went to *l'suach* (walk) in the field" that the word "*l'suach* (to walk)" is alluding to the word "*sichah*" which means to speak. The Torah is telling us that Yitzchak our Patriarch went out into the field to pray before nightfall. Ritva (one of the early commentators) explains that when Yitzchak went out into the field he did not pray for himself but rather on behalf of the generation. As it is known that when tzaddikim pray, they do not pray on their own behalf but for the sake of their generation.

It is interesting to note that the text of the Amidah was authored by the Men of the Great Assembly in the plural. Even when we pray for ourselves, we simultaneously pray on behalf of the entire Jewish people. Although the mindset of the average Jew is self-focused, nevertheless, it is necessary for each person to express himself with a sense of responsibility for the needs of the entire Jewish people.

Every Jew has a responsibility vis-à-vis every Jew as an individual and the community. We pray to Hashem for the ingathering of the exiles. Although we as individuals may not have the capability to influence or encourage other Jews to return to Judaism, nevertheless, through our sincere tefillos to Hashem we are able to affect the entire Jewish people.

## ***5. Love the Key Element to Spiritual Growth***

The Torah states, **"See - I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil, that which I command you today, to love Hashem, your**

**G-d, to walk in His ways, to observe His commandments...**” Moshe had presented the Jewish people with two possible paths – one of life and goodness and the other of death and evil. Immediately following this he states “...**I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in His ways ...**” It is evident that the prerequisite for following the ways of Hashem and fulfilling His commandments, which is the path of life and the good, is through the “love” of Hashem.

The Gemara in Tractate *Yivamos* states, “If there is a conflict between a Positive Commandment and a Negative Commandment, the Positive Commandment supercedes the Negative Commandment.” This principle is derived from the Law of *shatnes*. A Jew is not permitted to wear a combination of wool and linen; nevertheless, the Torah alludes (through juxtaposition) that if one has a four-cornered linen garment, which requires tzitzis (fringes), one ties into its corners woolen strings dyed with *techeiles*. Although the combination of wool and linen has been created, the Positive Commandment of putting tzitzis on a four-cornered garment supercedes the Negative Commandment of *shatnes*.

Ramban explains that a Positive Commandment represents “*ahavas Hashem* – the love of G-d” and a Negative Commandment represents “*yiras Hashem* – the fear of G-d.” When there is a conflict between performing the mitzvah, which represents the “love of Hashem,” and a Negative Commandment which represents the “fear of G-d,” the Positive Commandment of love takes precedence because loving G-d is a more advanced level than fearing G-d. The reason for this is because in order for one to refrain from transgressing, the fear of G-d is sufficient; however, in order to perform a Positive Commandment, one must be motivated – which is an expression of one’s love for G-d. The natural inclination of man is to love himself. There is nothing that one will not do to accommodate his own need. Thus, the Torah states, “...**I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in His ways ...**” **because** it is only through love that one will not find it difficult to walk in His ways and perform His mitzvos.

We say in the Amidah of Shabbos morning, “Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion: because You called him a faithful/dedicated servant.” Moshe rejoiced in the gift of Torah that was given to him by Hashem. Chazal explain the reason he rejoiced in his portion is because his level of dedication was that of a servant.

A servant is one who is completely subservient and subordinated to his master. The Torah states regarding the curses of Mount Eival, “Cursed is the one who does not uphold the Torah.” Rabbeinu Yonah explains in his work *Shaarei Teshuvah* (Gates of Repentance), that the Torah does not say “cursed is the one who does not observe the Torah” but rather it states cursed is one who does not *uphold* the Torah.” He explains that “the cursed” is referring to an individual who accepts the Torah in its entirety but rejects one of its precepts. He only accepts 612 out of the 613 mitzvos. This person is subject to be cursed. It is unheard of for a slave, who is the chattel of his master, to say “I will do everything that you command me except for one thing.” The rejection of authority in that one area, regardless of how minor it may be, is a revocation of acknowledging the master. So too, the individual who rejects even the most minor point of the Torah is dismissing G-

d's mastership. A slave/servant is one who is selflessly dedicated to the master. It was only because Moshe had totally negated himself to do the Will of Hashem that he rejoiced in the gift that was given to him by G-d.

The Jerusalem Talmud tells us that if Moshe had not initiated the praises of G-d that were sung after the closing of the Sea on the Egyptians (*oz yashir*) the Jewish people would have not done so on their own accord. Moshe needed to motivate them. How does one understand this? The Jewish people not only witnessed the Ten Plagues in Egypt but they also experienced and witnessed the splitting and closing of the Sea, which was a revealed miracle that was unparalleled in the history of creation. The revelation of the Divine Presence at the Sea was at such a level that even the lowly maidservant saw G-d's Presence at a more advanced level than Yechezkel the prophet. Yet, had it not been for Moshe initiating the praises of Hashem, the Jewish people would not have done so. This is because they did not have the same level of motivation that Moshe possessed nor had they negated themselves before G-d as Moshe had. Thus, they were not "faithful/dedicated servants."

The Chofetz Chaim writes regarding speaking negatively about one's fellow (*lashon hara*), if one needs to continuously suppress his inclination not to speak negatively of others, he will eventually fail. However if one always sees his fellow in a positive light it is not difficult for him to refrain from speaking *lashon hara* (evil speech) about his fellow. This is similar to one having a positive mindset regarding fulfilling the Torah. If one perceives the Torah obligation as a privilege and not something that is burdensome, he will not have difficulty to continuously succeed in his quest for spiritual growth.

If one cultivates a love of Hashem and understands and internalizes that he is the servant of his Master, then he will be motivated to perform the mitzvos of the Torah without any difficulty. As Moshe had stated, "**...I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in His ways to observe His commandments ...**"

## ***6. The Importance of the Past***

The last Positive Commandment that was communicated to Moshe at the end of his life was the obligation for every Jewish male to write for himself a sefer Torah (Torah scroll). The Torah states, "**So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel, place it in their mouth so that this song shall be for Me a witness against the Children of Israel.**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the "song" mentioned in the verse is referring to the Portion of *Haazinu*. This Portion should be written and taught to the Jewish people so that it should be imprinted in their hearts. It should be a testament for them so that when they enter into the Land and experience great levels of difficulties they should remember this song, which foretells the cause of all the difficulties they are experiencing. By recalling the song of *Haazinu* they will be able to

understand the reason behind their suffering and thus correct their ways. The Torah states, “This song will not be forgotten from the mouth of your offspring.” Rashi cites this as the source for the promise given by Hashem to the Jewish people that the Torah will never be forgotten from them. Since the Torah will not be forgotten from the Jewish people, the song of Haazinu will have meaning. However, although the words of Haazinu are explicitly clear and meaningful, they would have no impact on the Jewish people without accepting the Torah in its entirety or without Torah study.

The Torah tells us that the reason it is important for the Jewish people to remember the “song” is so that when they experience difficulties they will be able to reflect upon them and understand why they are in such a predicament. If one does not understand the cause of his difficulties, then the difficulties have no value. It is only when one realizes the cause of his problems, that he can seek a solution to correct his ways.

One needs a frame of reference to which he can turn in order to understand who he is, what is expected of him and the standard to which he is held. Without this frame of reference one is lost and without direction.

The Mishna in Tractate Taanis tells us that five tragedies occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av (Tisha B’Av) – the decree that the generation of the spies needed to perish in the desert over a forty year period, the destruction of the First and Second Temple, the massacre of Beitar, and the plowing under of the city (of Jerusalem by the Romans). After the Jews were driven from the Land, the Romans plowed under the city of Jerusalem. How could the fifth tragedy- the plowing under of the city be equated with the first four tragedies mentioned in the Mishna that occurred on Tisha B’Av? Seemingly, it is not even within the same realm of tragedy. However since Chazal listed it among the others, evidently the plowing under of the city was as tragic as or even more so than the rest. How do we understand this?

The Romans understood that if they destroyed the past history of the Jewish people they would effectively destroy the future of the Jewish people. If there was no remnant of the holy city of Jerusalem – the location of the Temple Mount, then the Jew would have no frame of reference regarding his identity. If there is no past, then there is no future. The relevance of the Jew to spirituality would have been eliminated. Thus, the plowing of the city was as tragic if not more so than the others enumerated in the Mishna.

Similarly, the Portion of Haazinu is the frame of reference for every Jew to be able to understand what is expected of him in life. At one time, if a Jew had difficulty in his life –whether it is a tragedy or misfortune - he either would seek out a rabbi or an elder member of his family or community – who were for the most part committed to Torah Judaism. Unfortunately at present, most Jews, because they no longer have this frame of reference, have no inkling where to turn. The Torah tells us however, that since it will not be forgotten from the Jewish people, every Jew can turn to Hashem through the Torah to

be able to understand the source of his problems and thus come upon a solution.