

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Ha'azinu

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

CONFLICTING FORCES

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"Hearken, O heaven, as I declare, let the earth hear my words of my mouth..." (32:1)

In the introductory *pasuk* of *Haazinu*, Moshe exclaims, "Listen, O heavens, and I shall speak; and the earth shall hear the sayings of my mouth."

Rav Moshe Weinberger cited the Lubavitcher Rebbe as explaining this *pasuk* as an allusion to the ongoing struggle that we constantly face, the battle that rages within each and every one of us between the two conflicting elements from which we are made.

As opposed to animals, which are created entirely from the earth, we are made from both heaven and earth. A human being is a composite of heaven and earth, containing within him both the elements of an animal and a heavenly soul.

Every day, we need to arbitrate between these conflicting forces. We need to decide whether to live like animals, which act entirely on impulse, which are driven purely by their physical drives without any other considerations, or to exercise restraint and live disciplined lives so we can actualize the heavenly element within us.

וּתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ... means that we are to "listen" to both heaven and earth. We are expected to "listen" to and obey our earthly drives, fulfilling our physical needs, but to also listen to the "heavens," to our divine image, to the calling of our soul. We must not blindly follow our earthly impulses; we are to "obey" also our soul, our heavenly spark, which pushes us to reach for greatness and connect with Hashem.

Animals walk on four legs, whereas human beings walk on just two feet. As a result, animals keep their face downward, to the ground, while we walk upright, facing the heavens.

We are to live with spiritual ambition, reaching for the skies, constantly striving to grow and achieve spiritual greatness.

DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

"Hearken, O heaven, as I declare, let the earth hear my words of my mouth..." (32:1)

In this week's Torah portion, Moshe instructs the people to write down the *shira* (the song) that he delivered just prior to his death. The beautiful poetry of Moshe's final address is indeed inspiring. However, Rav Tzadok (Pri Tzaddik, Ha'azinu 8) points out that to describe it as a *shira* is incongruent with its content. In the terminology of the Torah, *shira* is always associated with thankful praise over redemption from difficulties. In the beginning of the *shira* of *Ha'azinu*, although we do find praise of Hashem for the miraculous delivery from Egypt, it continues with frightening and disturbing predictions of our future. How can this be considered a form of song?

Rav Tzadok gives a fascinating answer. Although every individual has free will, the Torah reveals that as history evolves we will falter in our mission and have to bear the painful consequences. That is the bad news.

The good news is that the Torah also predicts that ultimately the Jewish people will repent (do *teshuva*) and fulfill their role as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Shemos 19:6).

In his *shira*, Moshe reveals the dreadful prophecies about the future in order that we should not fall into despair when we see them unfold in front of our eyes. Just as the predictions of the spiritual decline and physical oppression of the Jewish people came true, so will the fulfillment of the promises of their future redemption. This is a reason to sing.

For this reason, we always read this *parsha* just before (or just after) Yom Kippur in order to remind ourselves that although inevitably we will sin, it is even more certain that eventually we will do *teshuva* and regain - and even surpass - our previous glory.

All the details, the trials and tribulations, the ups and the downs are part of the elaborate weave of a magnificent tapestry - a *shira*.

THE SONG OF LIFE

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"Hearken, O heaven, as I declare, let the earth hear my words of my mouth..." (32:1)

Parashat Haazinu is written as a poem, in two adjacent columns, in flowery language, and is referred to as a שירה, a "song." It is meant to be sung. In fact, the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 31) brings an opinion that this *parsha* was sung by the *Leviim* in the *Beis HaMikdash* every Shabbos.

The question is, who would want to sing a song with these lyrics? The song of *Haazinu* contains some very harsh condemnations of Bnei Yisrael. וישמן ישורון ויבעט... ויטוש - "Yeshurun [*Am Yisrael*] grew fat and kicked [betrayed]... and abandoned the G-d who made them" (32:15). ותשכח קל מחוללך - "You forgot the G-d who brought you into existence" (32:18). וירא ה' וינאץ - "G-d saw and was incensed" (32:19). It proceeds to tell of the terrible calamities which G-d would bring upon the nation because of their betrayal and idol worship. Who would sing such a song?

The answer is that while the middle of this poem is, indeed, unpleasant and hard on the ears, the beginning and end are beautiful. It begins with a description of how Hashem loved Bnei Yisrael and chose them to be His special nation, showering them with blessings. And it ends with the eschatological vision of a redeemed world, when we no longer face troubles and adversity, so we can focus our time, energy and resources solely on fulfilling our mission of serving Hashem and representing Him to the world.

The Sifrei extols the greatness of the song of *Haazinu*, stating: גדולה שירה שיש בה עכשיו ויש בה לשעבר, ויש בה לעתיד לבוא - "This song is great, in that it contains the present, it contains the past, and it contains the future."

Haazinu is a beautiful song precisely because it combines the past, present and future. Life becomes a song only when it can be seen from this broad perspective, taking into account the past, present and future, without focusing exclusively on our current troubles.

Nobody's life is without challenges. Like *Haazinu*, every person's life will contain some hardship and negativity. But life can become a beautiful "song" despite the challenges and difficulties if we can "zoom out" and see the entire time continuum, if we can appreciate and feel grateful for the past and look with eager anticipation to the future. We must not define our lives based solely on the harsh experiences of the present, our current struggles and challenges.

We must never allow any particular crisis to become the sum total of our lives, the way we remember it. We need to focus on the big picture. And when we do, appreciating the past and looking excitedly to the future, life becomes a beautiful song.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Hearken, O heaven, as I declare, let the earth hear my words of my mouth..." (32:1)

Moshe addressed both heaven and earth in order to teach us that we are called upon to harmonize the two. The Torah originates in heaven and consists of G-d's vision for the perfection of the world. By spreading the knowledge of the Torah to ourselves and to others, we are bringing heaven down to earth. By reshaping both our own lives and the lives of others in accordance with the Torah's teachings, we are bringing life on earth up to heaven.

When we have made life into "heaven on earth" - reconciling the division between the two - heaven and earth testify how we have fulfilled our mission in life. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 9, pp. 213-214) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

ASKING FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Hearken, O heaven, as I declare, let the earth hear my words of my mouth..." (32:1)

One year, the residents of Baranovitch, Poland, requested of the revered rosh yeshivah, Rav Elchanan Wasserman zt'l, that he address them on *Shabbos Shuvah* (the Shaboos before Yom Kippur) and discuss the pathways to *teshuvah* in anticipation of Yom Kippur. Although he was reluctant to leave his yeshivah on this holy Shabbos, upon the insistence of the local townspeople he finally relented.

On Shabbos afternoon, the entire synagogue was packed as R' Elchanan walked to the podium and began to speak: "We find in today's *parshah* that Moshe Rabbeinu speaks to the heavens and earth and urges them to serve as witnesses to what he is about to say."

"Doesn't this seem somewhat arrogant," asked R' Elchanan, "that a human being, flesh and blood, ordered around the heavens and earth? It certainly seems out of character for a person like Moshe Rabbeinu, who is known for his extreme humility."

R' Elchanan paused for a moment.

"However, in his next words, Moshe Rabbeinu explains himself: 'For the Name of Hashem I call, give greatness to our G-d.' Moshe here reminds us that he enlists the services of the heavens and earth not for his own purposes or interests, but for the honor of the Almighty. And for Hashem's honor one can make use of the entire creation, since every being and every creature is obligated to honor Hashem!"

Looking out at the assemblage of laymen, R' Elchanan thundered:

"Everyone wishes for the best for the new year. Every person wants to have an abundance of blessings. But why? In what merit? For what purpose?"

"If we wish for good for the sake of the honor of Hashem - a comfortable living to help us educate our children along the path of Torah and our marvelous tradition, good health to allow us to properly fulfill all the *mitzvos* and raise our children to a life of Torah - if this is our perspective, then we can rightfully ask for all the goodness in the world, and we will receive it in plenty!"

With that, he stepped down and returned to the *beis midrash*. His *Shabbos Shuvah* drashah was short and succinct, but powerful enough to bring a proper perspective to the Days of Judgment and one's prayers during this time of year.

THROUGH THICK AND THIN

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Hearken, O heaven, as I declare, let the earth hear my words of my mouth..." (32:1)

The Slonimer Rebbe (Nesivos Shalom) interprets these words in a beautiful and inspiring manner. He explains that the word "*ha'shamayim*" represents those times when a Jew is elevated to the point where he has ascended tremendous spiritual heights and sees Hashem clearly. The word "*ha'aretz*" symbolizes those times when a Jew feels low, dejected and distant from Hashem. The Torah is teaching us that in both scenarios, Hashem is always readily available to speak with us. Whether it is *ha'shamayim v'adabera* - "heavens let me speak," in moments of clarity and closeness, or *v'sishma ha'aretz imrei fi* - "let the earth hear my words," in situations when we feel distant and down, Hashem is accessible to us no matter what.

The Slonimer Rebbe is providing incredible *chizuk* to us. While we may feel at times that Hashem may want nothing to do with us, *chas v'shalom*, the Torah is teaching us otherwise. Hashem is committed to us for eternity and will never forsake us. As long as we reach out, Hashem will always be there by our side. Let us make sure to take advantage of our unique opportunity and reach out to Hashem through thick and thin.

WILLFUL OBEDIENCE

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"Hearken, O heaven, as I declare, let the earth hear my words of my mouth..." (32:1)

Moshe begins the song of *Haazinu* by calling heaven and earth to attention - ותשמע הארץ, ואזינו השמיים. אמרי פי: "Listen, O heavens, and I shall speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth."

Rashi explains that Moshe summons the heaven and earth to serve as witnesses to the warnings that he was now presenting, because the heaven and earth endure for all eternity. After Moshe's passing, *Bnei Yisrael* might deny having heard the terms of the covenant. Moshe therefore calls upon the heaven and earth who can testify for all eternity that *Bnei Yisrael* were forewarned about the consequences of breaching the covenant with G-d.

The Midrash offers a different explanation for why Moshe summons the heavens and earth. The natural world, the Midrash observes, never disobeys. It always fulfills G-d's will for the universe. The sun will never rise in the west or set in the east. It will never rise or set any earlier or later than it was programmed to. Nature has no will of its own; it does precisely what Hashem wants it to do, at the precise time and in the precise manner that it is expected to. As we recite each month in *kiddush levana*, שלא ישנו את תפקידם - the celestial bodies never deviate from their assigned task.

Rav Soloveitchik expanded on this idea, noting that unlike the forces of nature, mankind introduces its own subjective will in determining the laws of morality.

People devise their own system of morality, their own definitions of right and wrong. Whereas nature obediently follows G-d's laws, people design their own set of laws for how to conduct themselves. We cannot negotiate with gravity; we cannot change the force of the earth's gravitational pull. But people reserve for themselves the right to negotiate with morality, to choose what is proper and what is improper. This is how Nazi Germany was able to perpetrate a genocide - because the people felt entitled to determine that a specific race needed to be exterminated for the sake of the world, that this was the just, ethical thing to do.

In the future, the world will come to recognize G-d's will as an immutable system, like the laws of nature. In the *תמלוך אתה ה' אלוֹקֵינוּ לְבָדֵךְ עַל כָּל* section of the Rosh Hashanah prayers, we pray and long for a time when G-d will be acknowledged as King over the universe. The Vilna Gaon explained that the word מוֹשֵׁל denotes rule by force, whereas the term מֶלֶךְ refers to a king who is elected, willfully chosen and accepted by the people. The day will come when *וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ* - G-d's rule will be willfully accepted by mankind. And at that time, His will for the world will be treated just like natural laws, such as gravity, as an immutable, non-negotiable system, which is not subject to people's preferences and whims.

...ותשמע הארץ. In outlining the terms of our covenant with Hashem, Moshe points to heaven and earth, and urges us to view G-d's laws the same way as we view the laws of nature, as a built-in feature of the world order, which cannot be adjusted based on our subjective attitudes.

WORDS LIKE DEW

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

“May my teaching drop like rain, may my word flow like dew...” (32:2)

Rabbi Simchah Bunim of Peshischa suggests that *divrei Torah* are compared to rain that falls because just as the benefits of rainfall are not immediately apparent but with time those seeds that were watered by the rain will grow and blossom; those who hear words of Torah are not immediately struck by the positive difference those words make to their lives, but after time will be able to look back and see the spiritual growth that resulted from those words.

As with many things in life, the key to success lies in the ability to be patient. We may not see results immediately, but with constant effort and application, results are guaranteed.

Rashi explains that there is a difference between *matar* - rain, and *tal* - dew. Whereas everyone is always happy to be the recipient of dew on his crops, as it falls at night and doesn't disturb anyone's daily routine (as Rashi phrases it, הכל שמחים בו), the advent of rain is often met with resistance, as plans may need to be altered or produce even destroyed as a result of the shower.

Therefore, when giving *mussar* to someone, be it a child or a pupil, one should not do so in an attacking or accusatory way that will only further anger and distance the listener. One must not be like the rain that is not universally welcomed and whose letters (*matar*) spell out ריב, טורח, משא - “burden, toil, and quarrel.”

If *mussar* needs to be administered, then it needs to be like טל, soft and gentle, in a way that הכל שמחים בו. This is alluded to in the word טל, which is the first letters of the words טוב לכל.

How can we achieve this? How can we reprimand someone who is guilty of negative behavior in a way that is הכל שמחים בו?

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk provides the answer. The comparison to rain and dew in this *pasuk* refers to the fact that rain and dew fall to the ground to sustain it without receiving anything in return. Theirs is a selfless act, for the benefit of others, not for themselves.

So too, if our rationale in giving *mussar* is a genuine love for the recipient and a desire to help him achieve his full potential in life, then our words will be like טל and be טוב לכל.

If, however, there is some personal agenda - if we are scolding because we feel hurt, let down and disappointed, and we lose sight of the other person - then our *mussar* is no longer selfless and will be greeted like ריב, טורח, משא. (Orach Chaim, p. 191)

GRADUAL GROWTH

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“May my teaching drop like rain, may my word flow like dew...” (32:2)

Moshe announces, יערוף כמטר לקחי, תזל בטל אמרתי - “My teaching shall pour down like rain; my speech shall drip like dew” (32:2). As many commentators noted, Moshe here compares the words of Torah to rain.

Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa explained the meaning of this metaphor. Rain and dew facilitate the growth of vegetation, but no growth is seen immediately after the droplets land on the ground. The effect is profound, but it unfolds over an extended period of time. It cannot be discerned immediately.

During the Covid lockdown, my daughter and I took up gardening. We bought seeds, and we got to work digging and planting. Every day, we went outside to observe the vegetables' progress. From day to day, we didn't see any change whatsoever. But my daughter took a picture each day, and when she compared the pictures taken ten days apart, the difference was remarkable. The vegetables' growth could not be seen from day to day, but it was readily discernible from one day to ten days later.

Rav Simcha Bunim explained that the same is true of spiritual growth. Torah impacts us like drops of rain, which slowly and gradually bring about a profound change in the plant. As Rabbi Akiva famously observed, a stream of water can carve stone over a lengthy period of time - showing us how Torah can change our hearts, slowly and steadily, one drop at a time. But we cannot expect this to happen overnight.

Whether it's our children, our students, or ourselves, spiritual growth cannot be assessed in real time. The effects of the Torah that we, our children or our students learn are sometimes discernible only many years later, just like the effect of rain on seeds can be seen only much later.

The Kotzker Rebbe famously noted that in the first paragraph of *Shema*, we are commanded to place the Torah's words על לבבך - “upon our hearts,” as opposed to placing them “in our hearts.” We would certainly have expected Hashem to command us to bring the Torah into our hearts, rather than instructing us to place them “on” our hearts. The Kotzker Rebbe explained that very often, our hearts are not ready to absorb the Torah's messages and teachings. Sometimes, the heart is too stiff, or too tightly shut, to be molded by the sacred words of the Torah. We are therefore commanded to place the Torah upon our hearts - and upon the hearts of our children and students - so that when the heart is ready and receptive, even if this happens only many years later, the words will penetrate and have the desired effect.

I have great admiration for our selfless, devoted educators, who invest so much time, work and effort into their students, knowing that they might never see the “plants,” the fruits of their labor. The products are, in many instances, noticeable only years later, once the students’ hearts have opened and have become ready to absorb the material they were taught. When we educate our children, our students, or ourselves, we must be patient, and realize that growth will occur gradually, over the long-term, and that we cannot expect to see immediate results.

ENCOUNTERING HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“May my teaching drop like rain, may my word flow like dew...” (32:2)

The extent to which rain falls depends on our merits, whereas the extent to which dew condenses does not. Thus, rain and dew allude to the two aspects of Divine revelation that we receive when we study the Torah: one is commensurate with our efforts, whereas the second is a Divine gift.

These two aspects of Divine revelation are present in the study of any part of the Torah. Studying any part of the Torah is an encounter with the Giver of the Torah, who reveals Himself subliminally within the words we utter and the ideas we study. In the narrower sense, however, we elicit the “rain” of Torah by studying the Torah’s laws and their derivation, and the “dew” of Torah by studying its inner dimension.

The full revelation of the Torah’s inner dimension will occur as part of the future Redemption. As we approach the advent of this Redemption, we are granted a taste of this future revelation. Thus, studying the inner dimension of the Torah enables us to live life on a higher, more spiritually developed level. This “taste” of the future Redemption inspires us to redouble our efforts to hasten its advent. (Sefer HaMa’amarim Melukat, vol. 1, pp. 457-464; *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 386-387; *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 38-40) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

TRUST THE PROCESS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“May my teaching drop like rain, may my word flow like dew...” (32:2)

Why did Moshe compare the learning and observance of Torah to rain and dew? Rav Alexander Zusha Friedman (Ma’ayana Shel Torah) quotes, in the name of Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, that often one does not see immediate results when it rains on a field. Rather, it takes time and cultivation by the farmer for one to ultimately notice change and development. The same is true regarding one’s *avodas Hashem*. We can’t expect to see noticeable growth overnight.

Instead, through constant hard work and effort, we will see the fruits of our spiritual labor over time.

We live in a world today where society has trained us to expect and demand immediate results; instant gratification is the name of the game. Yet, Rav Simcha Bunim teaches us that anything that has meaning and value takes time to produce and be felt.

We must exert patience and trust the process, and with that, we are sure to see the profound and powerful impact that our diligence will have on our relationship with Hashem.

SPIRIT OF INSPIRATION

Rebbe Nachman

“May my teaching drop like rain, may my word flow like dew; like storm winds upon grass and like rain upon vegetation...” (32:2)

Just as rain, dew and strong winds provide life to the world, so does the Torah [that Moshe transmitted]. (Rashi)

Ruach (wind) also means “spirit” - in particular, the spirit of Divine inspiration. Moshe’s words, which exemplify the power of the spirit of the *tzaddik*, bring Divine inspiration to each individual. (See Likutey Moharan I, 10:8)

SPIRITUAL SUSTENANCE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Hearken, O heaven, as I declare, let the earth hear my words of my mouth... May my teaching drop like rain, may my word flow like dew... When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d...” (32:1-3)

The “words” are words of Torah. When we turn our Torah studies into prayers, calling out to G-d and praying to Him to help us fulfill that Torah, our words will surely be heard. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 206)

Moshe intimated that if the heavens must listen, surely mankind should listen, too. Moshe’s words were like rain and dew, which possess the power to sustain all creation. “I will call in the Name of G-d” - each word that the *tzaddik* utters serves to reveal G-d’s presence throughout the world. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 141a)

Just as rain irrigates the earth to bring forth wonderful fruits, Moshe’s words could benefit the Jews who paid close attention to them. His words possessed such power because Moshe always called out to G-d and instructed the people to follow his example. Should the Jews sin or find themselves far from G-d, Moshe advised them not to despair, for “If you have sinned, how have you blemished Him?” (Iyov 35:6). Thus, one can always return to G-d. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 170a)

GIVING GREATNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d...” (32:3)

One meaning of “giving greatness to G-d” is enabling G-d, so to speak, to fulfill His desire in creating the world. G-d purposely left the world unfinished when He created it, intending for us to perfect it. Thus, G-d’s plan cannot be completed without us.

The way we help G-d fulfill His desire for the world is by living our lives in accordance with His teachings. Specifically, by constantly probing the depths of the Torah for new insights that can transform our lives and the lives of others, and by observing G-d’s commandments with renewed inspiration, we elicit new levels of Divine consciousness into reality. We thereby gradually and persistently help the world fulfill its purpose, transforming it into G-d’s ultimate home. (Hitva’aduyot 5747, vol. 1, pp. 32-33) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

PRIVILEGED TO PRAY

Chernovitzer Rebbe

“When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d...” (32:3)

In the prayer “*Modim of the Rabbis*” we say: “For inspiring us to thank You. Blessed is the G-d of thanksgivings.” We give thanks for the privilege of praising Hashem, and we bless and praise His great and Holy Name for the beneficence and the goodness He has shown us. That is why “I call out the Name of Hashem” and “ascribe greatness to our G-d.”

BECOMING ESSENTIAL

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“A faithful G-d, without iniquity; He is righteous and upright...” (32:4)

The commentators raise the obvious question of why Moshe would include in his praise of Hashem that אין עול - He is not corrupt, He does not commit evil. Is this an appropriate way to express awe and reverence for Hashem?

Both the Vilna Gaon and Rav Yisrael Salanter are cited as explaining this *pasuk* to mean that when Hashem judges a person, and determines whether and how to punish, He takes into account everyone who will be affected by the punishment. This *pasuk* begins, הצור תמים פעלו - Hashem’s actions are “perfect,” flawlessly just, without even a tinge of injustice. A human judge sentences a defendant based solely on the defendant’s actions. He will convict and sentence the defendant even if this causes considerable harm to the defendant’s family, friends and coworkers, and to the people he helps and supports.

Hashem, however, takes all this into account. His judgment is תמים, perfect, in the sense that nobody is harmed without deserving to be harmed. Hashem will not punish a person in a manner that will adversely affect the people around him unless He has determined that those people are themselves worthy of the harm they will experience.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck remarked that this concept sheds new light on the Mishna’s famous teaching in Pirkei Avos (1:6), קנה לך חבר - “Acquire for yourself a friend.”

The Mishna is urging us all to make ourselves essential, to foster meaningful relationships with people, to get involved, such that people need us and depend on us. The more friends we have, the more of a difference we make, and thus the more we are needed and relied upon.

If we get involved in the community, volunteer, give charity, and help people, then we are needed, we are essential. And thus, even if we’ve done something wrong, the קל אמונה ואין עול will take into account all the people who rely on us, on our work, our concern, our volunteerism and our help, and He will spare us on their account.

This is why the Mishna urges us, קנה לך חבר - because the more we are needed, the more likely we are to receive a favorable judgment due to our essential work that people depend on.

ESSENCE OF THE TORAH

Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov

“A faithful G-d, without iniquity...” (32:4)

This *pasuk* states the essence of the Holy Torah. However, if so, one may ask what is the necessity for the rest of the Torah?

The answer is that it is impossible for one to reach the level of the essence of the Torah without studying and observing the Torah from the beginning until this point.

GUIDED BY THE TORAH

Reb Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

“Ask your father and he will relate it to you, your elders and they will tell you...” (32:7)

The Torah is called “father” because Hashem created the world through Torah, with man being the essence of creation. Therefore, every Jew has a part in the Torah, and if he cleaves to and commits himself to the Torah, then it will guide him and teach him how to get closer to Hashem.

“Ask your father,” the Torah, and it “will relate to you”; in it, one will find everything that one must know. Through all time, even when times and generations change, it will give advice on how to bind oneself to Hashem, may He be Blessed.

ETERNAL PARENTHOOD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Remember the days of old; understand the years go generation after generation..." (32:7)

In order to understand that extraordinary phenomenon known as the Jewish people - a historical and social anomaly by any standard - the first thing we must do is to examine how this phenomenon began and what sustains it. Such an inquiry will lead us to the patriarchs and matriarchs.

To this day, the Jewish people refer to the patriarchs and matriarchs as our fathers and mothers: "Avraham, our father," "Sarah, our mother," and so on. This is because each one of us intuitively considers the patriarchs and matriarchs our personal parents, no less than our biological parents, who lovingly raise, educate, and provide for us. For the Jewish people, our forefathers are not merely ancestors from the distant past but living personalities who accompany us throughout our entire lives.

Knowing that the souls of these loving and concerned parents are always behind the scenes, soliciting G-d on our behalf, enhances our dedication to their ideals, as reflected in the Torah and its commandments. (Hitva'aduyot 5744, vol. 4, p. 2649) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

LEARNING FROM HISTORY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Remember the days of old; understand the years go generation after generation..." (32:7)

In Haazinu, we are urged to "remember years past and to understand 'dor v'dor' (each and every generation)" in the context of generations before this one (32:7). As Rabbi Hirsch suggests, the word "*shenos*" meaning "years past" could also mean "understand." In what way could understanding previous generations help us?

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin points out that in Shemos, there is a similar directive, although the difference is significant. In Shemos, it says "*dor l'dor*," which means "from one generation to the next." If we combine both phrases, there are two steps to evaluate and approach life situations. One step is to understand the context of the topic from a historical perspective. The second step is to evaluate life as it presents itself, a perspective more deeply rooted in reality as it currently exists. While our *pasuk* focuses on facing the current reality, it nevertheless mentions the elders that guide us through life based upon their living connections to the past. As we embark on a new year, appreciating events in the context of our history will help us both appreciate and navigate whatever issues confront us in the present.

CONSTANT AWARENESS

Reb Elimelech Lizhensk

"Remember the days of old; understand the years go generation after generation. Ask your father and he will relate it to you, your elders and they will tell you..." (32:7)

The Torah teaches us how we should conduct ourselves. We are to give thought and remember the greatness of Hashem at all times.

We are to remind ourselves of all the miracles and wonders of "the days of old" to instill in our hearts His greatness and majesty.

"Understand the years go generation after generation" teaches us to cleave to the behavior of the *tzaddikim*, the righteous ones, rather than the opposite, G-d forbid.

If one should ask how it is possible to isolate oneself, constantly think of the greatness of Hashem, separate from worldly issues, and earn a living to support one's family, then "ask your father," as the Holy Zohar calls Hashem "your father" (Ha'azinu 298b); pray to Hashem, may He be Blessed.

"He will relate it to you" means that He will extend to you abundance and blessing, and He will sustain you.

ILLUMINATED BOUNDARIES

Rebbe Nachman

"When the Supreme One gave nations their portion, when He separated the sons of man, He set the borders of the nations according to the number of the Children of Israel." (32:8)

Le'mispar (למספר, according to the number) shares the same root as *Sapir* (ספיר, illuminated). One who delves deeply into the Torah gains a special illumination called a "shining countenance." But one who succumbs to his evil desires is compared to a "darkened countenance."

Thus, "According to the '*mispar*' of the Jewish people" - in the merit of the illumination a Jew gains from studying Torah in depth - "He fixed the boundaries of the nations" - he can establish boundaries that control and contain the base desires associated with the "darkened countenance." (See Likutey Moharan I, 101:2)

INTERNAL GOODNESS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"But G-d's portion is His people; Yaakov is the lot of His heritage..." (32:9)

Even in the desert, a place seemingly void of good, there is good to be found. Because we are "G-d's portion, His people," we possess that good internally. (Likutey Halachot I, p. 3a)

CLOSENESS THROUGH CHARITY

Rebbe Nachman

"But G-d's portion is His people; Yaakov is the lot of His heritage..." (32:9)

Yaakov represents charity, as in the verse "You execute justice and charity in Yaakov" (Tehillim 99:4). When a Jew gives charity, he attains his heritage, the lot of the Patriarchs - which is the Holy Land, the Torah, and, above all, closeness to G-d. (See Likutey Moharan II, 71:10)

IN THE RIGHT TIME

Reb Noson of Breslov

"He found them in a desert - a desolate, parched wasteland... He protected them like the pupil of His eye..." (32:10)

Many Jewish souls are lost in spiritual deserts and wastelands, floundering in the paths of the wicked. Yet G-d always watches over them, and He will wait for the right moment to stir each soul with an arousal of good so it can eventually return to Him.

Moshe began the song of *Ha'azinu* by invoking the heavens (Devarim 32:1), indicating that a tranquil atmosphere enables the good in every Jew to hearken to and accept G-d's direction to return to Him. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 32a)

APPLE OF HIS EYE

Based on the Ramban

"He found them in a desert - a desolate, parched wasteland... He protected them like the pupil of His eye..." (32:10)

In *Ha'azinu*, the Torah paints a moving picture of Israel as a helpless child, abandoned in the wilderness, until G-d comes to rescue and embrace him. Hashem becomes both protector and provider, sustaining His people with manna for nourishment, a pillar of fire for protection, and a pillar of cloud for guidance.

As the verse declares: "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste, a howling wilderness... He guarded him as the apple of His eye."

This imagery is not limited to the past. Generations later, the prophet Zechariah affirms that G*d's watchful love for Israel endures: "Whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye." (Zechariah 2:8)

The phrase "apple of the eye" refers to the pupil - the most delicate and protected part of the body. To strike at it is to provoke an immediate, personal response. So too, when anyone seeks to harm Israel, it is as though they are striking at G-d Himself. His bond with His people is that intimate, and His protection that enduring.

FINDING FAITH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He found them in a desert - a desolate, parched wasteland... He protected them like the pupil of His eye..." (32:10)

A "find" is something we come upon unexpectedly, rather than as the result of any efforts we have expended to earn it. When G-d gave us the Torah at Har Sinai, we undertook to relate to Him beyond the dictates of reason or logic, that is, with pure faith. Faith, being by definition beyond the reach of intellect and therefore unattainable by unaided human effort, can truly be categorized as a "find."

Thus, the use of the verb "to find" in describing G-d's encounter with the Jewish people at Har Sinai indicates that, in return for us binding ourselves to Him on pure faith, beyond reason and logic, G-d bound Himself to us similarly, transcending reason and logic.

Inasmuch as G-d gives us the Torah anew each day, this lesson inspires us to renew our pure faith in Him daily, as well. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, p. 210) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

NEVER TOO DISTANT

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"He found them in a desert - a desolate, parched wasteland... He protected them like the pupil of His eye..." (32:10)

Moshe recalls, בארץ מדבר ימצאנו - *Bnei Yisrael* discovered Hashem in the desert, at Mount Sinai, when He revealed Himself to them. The Rachmastrivka Rebbe, in *Amaros Tehoros*, cites a deeper explanation of this *pasuk* from the Ohr La'shamayim. Sometimes we find ourselves spiritually "dehydrated," feeling as though we are in a "desert," all alone, remote and distant from Hashem, unworthy of His love. The Torah here assures us that בארץ מדבר ימצאנו - we can find Hashem even there, even in a state of "dehydration." We are never too distant from Hashem to connect with Him. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, no matter how low we have fallen, we are not too far. We can still come back to Him and restore our relationship with Him.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe adds that the word מדבר ("*midbar*") in this *pasuk* can be punctuated differently, to be read as "*medaber*" - "speak." The way we find our way back to Hashem in the "desert" is by speaking, by talking to Him, by expressing to Him our feelings, by thanking Him, by communicating to Him our fears and frustrations, by talking about Him, and by engaging in His Torah. In short, the way to find Hashem in a "desert," in our state of spiritual emptiness, is to start the process by talking. The more we speak to and about Hashem, the more likely we are to find our way back to Him.

WINGS OF AWAKENING

Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov

"Like an eagle arousing his nest hovering over his young, he spreads his wings..." (32:11)

The eagle, before he enters the nest, flutters his wings to awaken the birds. So does Hashem, so to speak, awaken his children to His service through Yaakov, the chosen of the forefathers for the category of an "eagle" (Kabbalistic terminology).

When some light enters the heart and a great desire to serve Hashem is aroused, it is our father Yaakov who is awakening us and giving us this desire. Those that are wise do not become arrogant in thinking that these thoughts come only from their good deeds.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He [Hashem] would have them ride on the heights of the earth... He nurtured him with honey from a rock, and oil from the hardness of a rock." (32:13)

The significance of making the Jewish people "ride on the highest place on earth" is that G-d has rendered the collective Jewish people, as well as each individual Jew, above the limitations of physical reality. This implies that by nature, the Jewish people and each individual Jew is able to influence and affect the world.

The way we manifest this innate power is stated in the second half of this verse: "He nurtured them with honey from a rock, and oil from flint-stone." Honey and oil allude to the inner dimension of the Torah (Chagigah 13a). It is by studying the inner dimension of the Torah and enhancing our relationship with G-d through these teachings that we actualize our power to influence and affect the world from our vantage point far above it.

Furthermore, the Torah's inner teachings inspire us with the sense of responsibility to use our G-d-given powers to influence the world positively, ultimately transforming it into His true home. (Hitva'aduyot 5749, vol. 1, p. 76) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ANTICIPATING THE REVERSAL

Reb Zusia of Anipoli

"And He will say, 'I will hide My face from them and see what their end is; for they are a generation of reversals, children without upbringing in them...' (32:20)

Hashem will temporarily hide His face and wait to see what will come later. Since this is a "generation of reversals," they can easily change because of their nature. Therefore, they may reconsider and begin to mend their ways.

UNBREAKABLE BOND

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And He will say, 'I will hide My face from them and see what their end is; for they are a generation of reversals, children without upbringing in them...' (32:20)

By referring to us as His "children," G-d let it be known that He would never sever His relationship with us, and that we can never sever our relationship with Him - just as parents can never sever themselves from their children, and children can never sever themselves from their parents.

The relationship between parents and their children is so essential, so strong, that no matter how seriously it may be tested, in the final analysis it will always overcome any behavior that might seem to threaten it.

It is therefore pointless to try to hide or flee from this relationship, and senseless to think that it can ever be forfeited. G-d's love for us is infinitely stronger than anything we may have done to weaken it. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5715, pp. 319-320) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

WALL OF FIRE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"For My wrath kindled a fire, and it will blaze to the very foundations. It will consume the land and its produce. It will set fire to what is founded upon mountains." (32:22)

Rashi tells us this phrase, "It [G-d's wrath] will set fire to what is founded upon mountains," refers to Jerusalem, the Jewish capital. G-d informed the people that betraying their covenant would result in the destruction of the Temple city, and this is indeed what happened.

But every Divine punishment is the transmutation of Divine energy that G-d had intended to bestow as a blessing and still waits to do so. And so, G-d tells us that in the Messianic future, "Jerusalem will be settled beyond its [former] walls... I will be a wall of fire for it all around, and for glory I will be in its midst, declares G-d" (Zechariah 2:8-9; Rashi). Jerusalem will no longer be enclosed within a physical wall; G-d's fire will protect it rather than destroy it.

Allegorically, this means that our consciousness will then be so consumed by our fiery Divine enthusiasm that we will not need to protect ourselves from outside influences. We will be immune to the formerly toxic effects of materiality, since we will see only the Divine dimension of all reality.

The more we realize this potential even now, the more we hasten its ultimate fulfillment with the Messianic Redemption. (Hitva'aduyot 5747, vol. 1, pp. 99-100, 106-109) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HERE TO STAY

Preshburger Rebbe

"I will use up My arrows on them..." (32:23)

Rashi comments: "My arrows shall be used up, but they [Israel] will not be used up." The nations that persecute Israel use the arrows of Hashem but Israel will not be annihilated. Their arrows will be used up but Israel "will not be used up." The Jewish people will be forever.

BEING ETERNAL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I will use up My arrows on them..." (32:23)

Although this statement is a threat, it is also - as Rashi points out - a blessing:

"My supply of arrows will come to an end, but nevertheless the Jewish people will not come to an end."

In other words, implicit in this verse is an affirmation of the eternity of the Jewish people. Our perpetuity is derived from G-d's perpetuity; inasmuch as we are part of Him, so to speak, we share something of His eternity.

Now that we have survived all the horrors of exile, we can be sure that we have fulfilled whatever requirements there may have been to experience negativity throughout our long history.

We are on the threshold of redemption and can confidently look forward to nothing but the brightest future and should therefore prepare ourselves accordingly. (Hitva'aduyot 5748, vol. 4, p. 123) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

THE FEW, THE PROUD

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"I thought, 'I shall abandon them, I would eliminate from mankind mention of them...' (32:26)

The word "*apei hem*" refers to a corner, fringe or remnant (*pe'ah*). The surviving number of Jews in the world today is only a small percentage of what the natural increase in population under normal circumstances should have been.

Josephus' estimate of over ten million Jews in the Roman Empire should indicate a current population of over 500 million Jews! And yet the Jewish world population is not much larger today than Josephus' estimate almost two thousand years ago. Hashem's forecast of a diminished nation has certainly come to pass, especially in this past century, due to both World Wars, Stalin, and raging assimilation and intermarriage in the Western world.

Although at first glance, this prophecy appears to be dire and negative, the words of Torah have many facets to them, and to see the matter as purely bad news would be a distorted vision of Jewish life and history.

Being small in number, says Rabbi Berel Wein shlit'a, lends itself to creating a sense of importance and singularity for each member of the group. The realization that there is a certain urgency and prominence to one's actions is enhanced by the comprehension that one is part of a very small group, and therefore every individual counts enormously in its fate and success.

Judaism is built upon the principle of *bishvili nivra ha'olam* - "the entire universe was created only for me" (Sanhedrin 37). There are billions of people in this world, but there is no one else who is me; no one else has my personality, my particular talents, and my potential contributions to society. Therefore, my responses to the challenges of life are of enormous importance to my Creator, my people, and humanity in general.

But, human nature being what it is, people often enjoy being lost in the crowd, in achieving blessed anonymity, thus believing they have escaped confrontation with their challenging destiny. The message of the song of *Ha'azinu* is that such a belief in the possibility of escaping from one's ultimate responsibility is wrong. The destiny of *Klal Yisrael* is associated with each and every one of us, and our personal lives and achievements are measured against that standard. Our national contributions can occur only when one has a sense of individuality, uniqueness and self-worth.

The realization of the Jewish nation's small population certainly contributes to the formation of this attitude. If there were massive numbers of Jews, the miracle of Jewish survival would not be impressive. The very smallness of Jewish numbers is a great testimony to the eternity of Israel and the Torah values we represent.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"See, now, that I, I am He - and no god is with Me. I put to death, and I bring to life. I strike, and I heal. There is no protection from My power..." (32:39)

"Now" is the time, no matter when it is or where a person finds himself. "Now" - because G-d is always present, and a person can always draw close to Him. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 40b)

FULFILLING HIS PROMISE

Preshburger Rebbe

"See, now, that I, I am He - and no god is with Me..." (32:39)

When the Jewish People left Egypt Hashem said, "I will be what I will be" (Shemos 3:14) - I will be with the Jewish People during their dispersions.

Now, Hashem says to the Jewish People that the time has come that "I am He." Hashem promised that "I will be"; now the time has come, and Hashem is here.

NEVER FORESAKEN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"For I raise My hand to heaven and I shall say, 'As I live forever.'" (32:40)

The Hebrew word for "forever" literally means for the world," i.e., "as long as the world exists." In other words, G-d is here vowing that, no matter what the circumstances, His presence will always be "in the world," accompanying the Jewish people. Whatever our tribulations, He will never forsake us.

We should therefore never fall into the conceptual trap known as "deism" - the assumption that G-d, after having created the world, retreated into heaven, from where He merely passively observes the world running according to the brute laws of nature.

Rather, this verse tells us to remain confident that G-d is involved in our lives. He feels the pain of our exile, and - as He promises in the verses that follow this one - He will soon redeem us and the whole world. (Sichot Kodesh 5736, vol. 1, pp. 39-44) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

GRASPING JUDGEMENT

Rebbe Nachman

"I shall sharpen My lightning sword, and My hand shall grasp judgment. I shall return vengeance upon My enemies and repay those who hate Me..." (32:41)

G-d "grasps" and restrains His judgments even against a wicked person. Since this person may have done some good deed for which he deserves reward, G-d enables him to flourish until he has used up all his merit. Then judgment will be exacted from him in full and he will suffer his downfall.

The same idea applies to a righteous person. He may have sinned or committed an error for which he must be punished. But because G-d "grasps judgment in His hand," He also holds back punishment from a righteous person who has erred.

Eventually, when the misdeed is punished, the judgment is no longer severe, and then the righteous person can receive his reward. (See Likutey Moharan I, 55:3)

HIS LAND, HIS PEOPLE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Sing, nations, the praise of His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants; He will bring retribution upon His enemies, and appease His land, His people." (32:43)

Just as the Jewish people possess the unique status of being G-d's chosen people - along with all the responsibilities pertaining to this status - the Land of Israel possesses the unique status of being G-d's chosen land. This being the case, the Jewish people are intrinsically tied to the Jewish land.

Inasmuch as these are intrinsic connections, which are not based on human logic, there may indeed be many seemingly logical arguments against this reality. In order to preclude such arguments, G-d states in the preceding verses that He "raises His hand to heaven" in order to swear that the connections between Him and His people, between Him and His land, and between His land and His people, are intrinsic, eternal, and inviolable.

Our awareness of this truth should inspire us all to do whatever we can to ensure that the Jewish people and the Jewish land live up to their destiny, to be a "light to the nations" (Yeshayahu 49:6), and thereby hasten the Messianic Redemption, when, as promised in this verse, G-d will redeem "His land, His people." (Hitva'aduyot 5730, vol. 1, pp. 45-51) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

HUMBLE GREATNESS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Moshe came and said all of the words of this song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea ben Nun..." (32:44)

Forty years earlier, Yehoshua's name had already been changed from Hoshea (Bamidbar 13:16), so why does the Torah refer to him now - as he is becoming the new leader of the Jewish People - with his original name?

Rashi answers that the Torah is testifying to Yehoshua's humility. That despite accepting the mantle of leadership and the great accolade that this position came with, he remained as humble now as he had always been.

The reward for humility and punishment for haughtiness is described by the Gemara (Eruvin 13b) as follows: "Anyone who makes himself small - Hashem will raise him up. Anyone who makes himself haughty - Hashem will make him small. Anyone who chases after honor - honor will flee from him. Anyone who flees from honor - honor will chase after him."

On these words, a student once queried Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, "Rebbe, I don't understand. I run away from honor, but it does not pursue me. So where is the truth in the Gemara's statement?"

Rav Simcha Bunim replied to him, "From your question, I see that when you run away from honor you are always turning around to see if it is following you. That is not considered fleeing from honor."

The Orchos Tzaddikim writes that a small *mitzvah* performed with humility is far superior to a larger one performed with haughtiness. For example, one who donates \$18 with modest humility has more value in Hashem's eyes than a donation of \$18,000 given with feelings of conceit and self-glory.

The importance of humility and the danger of arrogance, therefore, cannot be overstated, for one or the other can make or break the worth of one's *mitzvah*. Consequently, it is something that we need to persistently work on, as the Orchos Tzaddikim states: Humility is the ladder one needs to climb to reach the ways of Hashem.

NEED FOR HUMILITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And Moshe came and said all of the words of this song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea ben Nun...” (32:44)

As Rashi tells us, Moshe did a number of things on the last day of his life in order to demonstrate that the leadership was now passing to Yehoshua. In certain respects, Moshe made Yehoshua his equal on this day. Nonetheless, the Torah refers to Yehoshua by his original name, Hoshea, in order to teach us that his ascent to greatness did not cause him to become haughty. On the contrary, he continued to act modestly - as if he were still the novice he was before Moshe renamed him Yehoshua.

G-d has blessed us all with unique talents, sensibilities, and gifts. If we utilize these gifts properly - as we should - we will thereby rise to a position of greatness or leadership in some aspect of life. When this happens, it is tempting to focus on how we achieved our position in the merit of our own qualities, forgetting that they were given to us by G-d. It is at this point that we need to follow Yehoshua's example, remaining humble.

This humility will in fact enable us to succeed in our position of leadership and remain successful leaders. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 29, pp. 201-202) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

EVERY BIT COUNTS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Apply your heart to all the words that I testify against you today... to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah...” (32:46)

Mashal: A fellow was walking on the beach when he saw a local native who kept leaning down, picking something up and throwing it in the water. When he got closer he noticed that the native was picking up the starfish that had been washed up on the shore and was throwing them one at a time back into the water, so that they wouldn't die.

The fellow told the native that he was wasting his time; there must be thousands of starfish on this beach as well as all along the coast. “You can't possibly get to all of them. Don't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?”

The local native smiled, bent down, and picked up yet another starfish. As he threw it back into the sea, he replied, “Tell you what - it made a difference to that one!”

Nimshal: As Jews, we must understand that even if we can't always do everything right, each little thing that we do accomplish makes a big difference. The mere fact that we are trying shows Hashem that we care and are concerned about being better Jews. Hashem is very patient. As long as He sees that it bothers us, and we are making an attempt, that itself could help us merit a *shanah tovah* - a good year. (Rav S. Price)

HEARTFELT PERFORMANCE

Reb Chaim Tzvi Taub of Seghut

“Apply your heart to all the words that I testify against you today... to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah... it is your life, and through this matter shall you prolong your days...” (32:46-47)

Intention is the most significant factor of a deed, and it is not words that express that intention, as the prophet Yeshayahu said: “With their mouth and with their lips they honor Me, but their heart they draw far away from Me.”

It is written in our holy books that a *mitzvah* that is performed without intent or concentration is like a body without a soul, for the intent of the *mitzvah* is the life of the *mitzvah* and the performance of it is the body. It is understood that if the body has a deficiency and no vigor, its vital strength and spirit are not in it.

That is what the *pasuk* teaches: “Apply your heart to all the words” - for all the *mitzvos* that you perform, your heart must be in them. “For it is your life” - the life of a *mitzvah* is in the heart, “and through this matter shall you prolong your days.”

ALWAYS RELEVANT

Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch

“For it is not a word empty from you; rather, it is your life, and through this matter shall you prolong your days on the land...” (32:47)

In the Torah, there is not a word that does not have *you*, *yourselves* (Israel), as its content. Hence, the interpretation of this *pasuk* would be that this summons you to understand the law of the Torah and to observe it.

Not one word of the Torah is irrelevant. Every word in it contains truths vital to all of your existence and all of your aspirations.

BLUEPRINT OF THE WORLD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“For it is not a word empty from you; rather, it is your life, and through this matter shall you prolong your days on the land...” (32:47)

The Torah contains all the instructions and lessons that every individual needs in order to live his or her life in accordance with G-d's expectations. This is as it should be, for the Torah is the “blueprint” that G-d used when He created the world.

If for some reason we are not sure what the Torah requires of us in a specific situation, we are bidden to consult with qualified Torah scholars, who have learned from their own teachers how to correctly apply the Torah's wisdom to our lives. (Sichot Kodesh 5739, vol. 1, pp. 129-131) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

BRINGING OUT OUR BEST

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d spoke to Moshe on that very day, saying..." (32:48)

Allegorically, Moshe represents our Divine soul, our inner identity that motivates us to seek out G-d and dedicate ourselves to studying His Torah and fulfilling His commandments. In this context, the Jewish people's reluctance to let Moshe go represents our argument against G-d: If He wants us to seek Him out, study His Torah, and fulfill His commandments, why not let our Divine soul manifest itself more? Why is its voice drowned out by that of our animating soul, which constantly urges us to pursue everything but our Divine goals?

G-d's answer is that the hiddenness of our Divine soul is in our best interest. Answering life's challenges requires us to summon our innermost powers, and the process of drawing these powers to the surface makes us into better people. Moshe's leadership would have made the entry into the Land of Israel too easy. Similarly, if our Divine soul were more manifest than it naturally is, the challenges posed by the materiality of this world would be too easy to face, and we would thereby lose the opportunity to become our best, most Divine selves.

Transforming ourselves by overcoming challenges is our personal redemption, which both prepares us for the collective Messianic Redemption of humanity and hastens its arrival. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 19, pp. 339-347) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HAFTORAH

IT'S ALL FROM ABOVE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And he said, 'Hashem is my Rock and my Fortress and my Deliverer.'" (Shmuel II 22:2)

The concept of acceptance is the single greatest challenge we have in our relationship with Hashem. Both Moshe Rabbeinu in the *parshah* and Dovid in the *haftorah* declare their acceptance of Hashem's HaMelech justice as the ultimate expression of mercy and compassion. Both had rather tumultuous lives, and their successes stemmed from their full acceptance of Hashem's sovereignty.

In the *haftorah*, Dovid HaMelech sings the praises of Hashem. He lived a turbulent yet blessed life, and he gave thanks to Hashem for his numerous victories and successes. He gazed back upon the events of his life with a clarity of vision and understanding. He described Hashem as his "Rock, Fortress, and Deliverer." Dovid recognized that he had merited to fulfill one of Hashem's promises, no less important than Moshe's job of bringing *Bnei Yisrael* to the borders of Eretz Yisrael, for he had started the Kingdom of Dovid, a dynasty that assured the building of the *Beis HaMikdash* and the future coming of Mashiach.

The Chafetz Chaim in Shem Olam (Sha'ar Shemiras HaLashon, Chapter 3) stresses that all our losses and gains are through Hashem's orchestration. All of our actions, and even our thoughts, are enveloped by Hashem's supervision. The Targum Yonasan and Targum Onkelos explain that when a person decides to purchase an item, Hashem gives him the idea to acquire it. The Chafetz Chaim adds that even when someone sustains another person or does any good for him, it all comes from Hashem, as it was He who put the idea into the benefactor's heart.

Therefore, if someone doesn't want to do a person a favor, the person needing the help shouldn't hold it against him. The Chafetz Chaim says it is like a man who is looking for someone named Reuven and he is told to look among a certain group of people for him. When he gets there he finds that none of those people is the man he is looking for. Would this fellow complain to them, "Why aren't any of you Reuven?" Of course not. Rather, he will just go somewhere else and continue looking for him until he reaches his goal. So too, if help does not come from the person one expects it to come from, obviously he is not the one who Hashem has chosen to be His messenger to help him.

This concept of doing one's best but then leaving the rest to Hashem is one of the main focal points of a Jew's existence. It is the very quality that enabled us to survive as a people throughout the ages. The fact that we have *bitachon* and complete acceptance that everything comes from Hashem, and everything is good and just, is the main reason we are still here today.

FULFILLING OUR MISSION

Imrei Emes

"...and I have guarded myself from iniquity (lit. my iniquity)..." (Shmuel II 22:24)

Every person was created for the purpose of effecting some specific improvement in the world, and it is particularly in this regard that the evil inclination goes to work, attempting to cause one to sin.

Therefore, Dovid HaMelech prays: "And I have guarded myself from iniquity." Let me continue to be able to protect myself from that sin that is regarded as my particular iniquity, so that I should not stumble in precisely those matters that I was put into this world to improve.

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