

# Torah Weekly

September 20-26, 2020  
2-8 Tishrei, 5780

Torah: Ha'azinu:  
Deuteronomy 32:1-52  
Haftorah: Hosea 14:2-10;  
Micah 7:18-20

PARSHAT HA'AZINU

## Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

## Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

## Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

**Heaven and Earth** It contains only 43 verses, yet the song Moses taught the Jews on the last day of his life spans all of Jewish history, from the very beginning when "He found them in a desert land," all the way to the future redemption when the nations will praise G-d, "For He will... appease His land [and] His people."

In the opening phrase, Moses calls for heaven and earth to bear witness:

*Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak! And let the earth hear the words of my mouth! (Deuteronomy 32:1)*

Because Jewish law requires legal matters to be established on the basis of two witnesses, Moses called upon both heaven and earth to bear witness that he indeed had conveyed this song to the people.

The testimony of heaven and earth is more than merely a poetic metaphor. Moses was conveying the profound lesson that in order for the message to endure, the Jew must evoke both heaven and earth.

The purpose of the Jewish people—the objective of all Jewish history—is the marriage of heaven and earth. While many spiritual seekers and virtually all religions seek to escape the confines of the flesh and climb heavenward, the Jew is charged with a far more profound calling: first create peace, then build a bridge, and finally marry heaven and earth.

Moses uses different words to address the heavens and the earth. He says: "Give ear, O heavens (*Haazinu*), and "let the earth hear" (*va'tishma*). The Hebrew word *haazinu*, give ear, is used specifically when the listener is in close proximity to the speaker. The word *tishma*, hear, however, applies to hearing something

distant. Indeed, the Midrash explains that Moses was close to the heavens—i.e., spirituality was the reality of his existence. Hence he employed the word *haazinu* when addressing the heavens. The material world, however, was distant and insignificant to Moses, so he used the word *tishma* when addressing the earth.

Moses was close to the heavens, but since the purpose of Judaism is to connect both matter and spirit, Moses had to invoke not only heaven but earth as well.

We each have a "heaven" and "earth" within us. Part of us seeks the transcendent and the spiritual, while another part is drawn to the earthly and the physical. Perhaps more than any other part of the song, the opening words, "Give ear O heavens" and "Let the earth hear," capture the mission of the Jew.

The song is read on Shabbat in close proximity to the holidays of Yom Kippur and Sukkot, for Yom Kippur and Sukkot are the embodiment of the song. On Yom Kippur we reach to the heavens, we connect to the core of our soul and feel unified with G-d. But, just as we reach the climax of the holiness of Yom Kippur, we transition to preparation for the holiday of Sukkot, when we celebrate the physical bounty with which we have been blessed:

*You shall make yourself the Festival of Sukkot for seven days, when you gather in [the produce] from your threshing floor and your vat... Seven days you shall celebrate the Festival to the L-rd, your G-d, in the place which the L-rd shall choose, because the L-rd, your G-d, will bless you in all your produce, and in all the work of your hands, and you will only be happy.*

(Deuteronomy 16:13-15.)

The combination of Yom Kippur and Sukkot represents the life of the Jew. We are "close to heaven," we connect to our angelic, spiritual, and pure soul on Yom Kippur, and then we connect that spiritual awareness to the field, to sanctify and uplift the blessings of everyday life.

(Adapted from the teachings of the Rebbe, Likutei Sichot, Haazinu, vol. 2.) *By Rabbi Menachem Feldman*

## The Inspiring Story of Rabbi Avner, the Sinner

I recently read a fascinating story that I'd like to share with you. Moses ben Nachman, commonly known as Nachmanides, and also referred to by the acronym Ramban, was a leading medieval Jewish scholar in the 13th century, in Girona, Catalonia. He had a disciple, Avner, who strayed from the path of observant Judaism, left his community and became an important government official. One Yom Kippur, Avner sent guards to the synagogue, ordering the Ramban to appear before him. In his palace, before the eyes of his former teacher and master, Avner slaughtered a pig, roasted it and ate it on this holiest of fast days. The Ramban couldn't contain his anguish and cried, "What caused you to fall so low? What compelled you to abandon the holy teachings of your ancestors?" "It was you, my master!" Avner roared derisively. "Your teachings completely disillusioned me and caused me to reject Judaism." "You were once teaching the Torah portion of Ha'azinu," he explained. "You taught us that in this brief Torah

portion of 52 verses, the Torah encodes all the details of the long history of the Jewish people until the coming of Moshiach. You claimed, too, that encoded in its verses are the names of every Jew to have ever lived.

“This is obviously preposterous!” thundered Avner. “How could 4,000 years of history and millions of names be compressed into 614 words?”

“What I said is absolutely true,” declared the Ramban.

“If so, then I must be found there, too. Where is my name, and where is my fate?”

The Ramban’s expression grew serious. He prayed silently to G-d to reveal this secret.

“Your name, Avner, can be found in verse 26. Tell me, what is the third letter in these words: AmaRti (*reish*) AfEihem (*aleph*) AshBita (*beit*) Me’eNosh (*nun*) ZichRom (*reish*)?”

The verse reads: “I [G-d] said in my heart, that I would scatter them, causing their memory to cease from mankind.”

Here, G-d rebukes the Jewish people for turning away from the path of the Torah and becoming so evil that He wanted to destroy them. Avner turned deathly white and began to wail bitterly. “Is there any hope for me?” he begged. “Is there anything that I can do to rectify my terrible sins?”

The Ramban looked compassionately at his former student. “The verse itself has provided the rectification. It says that G-d will scatter them till their memory is erased. You must run away, never to be heard from again.”

Avner boarded a ship and was never seen again.

Notice that the name encoded in the third letters of this verse is not Avner, but includes the prefix “R,” which stands for Rabbi Avner. Even though up until this point Avner led a life that was the complete antithesis of what a rabbi stands for, the Torah calls him “Rabbi.”

Avner had free choice to choose whether or not he would repent. But the Torah is confident that ultimately the holiness of his soul will shine through, and that through repentance he will have transformed himself not only into an Avner, but an illustrious Jew, a rabbi.

What a lesson in how we must view every Jew, even ourselves—with the confidence that even a great sinner like Avner can, and will, become a great rabbi. *By Chana Weisberg*

**Sunday, September 20, 2020 --- 2 Tishrei, 5781**

**First Shabbat (3760 BCE)**

Today marks the first Shabbat, when G-d rested after creating the world for six days: G-d completed on the seventh day His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, for then He rested from all His work that G-d created to do (Genesis 2:2–3). To commemorate this day, we are instructed to keep the day of Shabbat holy and rest from all work:

Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it. For six days you shall work and perform all your labor, but the seventh day is Shabbat to the L-rd your G-d; you shall not perform any labor...For [in] six days the L-rd made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is within them, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the L-rd blessed the day of Shabbat and sanctified it (Exodus 20:8–11).

**Monday, September 21, 2020 --- 3 Tishrei, 5781**

**Assassination of Gedaliah (423 BCE)**

Tishrei 3rd is a fast day mourning the assassination of the Jewish royal Gedaliah ben Achikam, governor of the Land of Israel for a short period following the destruction of the First Temple. Gedaliah's killing spelled the end of the small remnant of a Jewish community that remained in the Holy Land after the destruction. They soon fled to Egypt. (According to many opinions, the assassination of Gedaliah actually occurred on Rosh Hashanah, but the commemoration of the event is postponed to the day after the festival).

**Passing of Rebbetzin Devorah Leah (1792)**

Rebbetzin Devorah Leah, daughter of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi and mother of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (the "Tzemach Tzedek"), passed away on this date just three days after her young son's third birthday.

**Tuesday, September 22, 2020 --- 4 Tishrei, 5781**

**Passing of R. Yoel Baal Shem (1713)**

R. Yoel Baal Shem was a saintly rabbi and miracle worker who led the Society of Hidden *Tzaddikim* (righteous men) after the passing of its leader, R. Eliyahu Baal Shem. He was succeeded by R. Adam Baal Shem, who was in turn succeeded by R. Israel Baal Shem Tov.

**Wednesday, September 23, 2020 --- 5 Tishrei, 5781**

**Rabbi Akiva martyred (134)**

The great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Akiva, was taken captive by the Romans on Tishrei 5 of the year 3894 from creation (134 CE). His subsequent torture and execution is recalled in the stirring *Eleh Ezkarah* poem of the Yom Kippur service.

**Birth of Naftali**

Naftali, the son of Jacob and Bilhah, sixth of the Twelve Tribes, was born on the 5th of Tishrei. He lived to be 133 years old.

**Thursday, September 24, 2020 --- 6 Tishrei, 5781**

**Rebbetzin Chana (1964)**

Tishrei 6 is the yahrtzeit of Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson (1879-1964), mother of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

**Passing of R. Aryeh Leib, "Grandfather of Shpoli" (1811)**

R. Aryeh Leib was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov and of R. DovBer of Mezeritch, known for his passionate service of G-d. According to many sources, R. Aryeh Leib of Shpoli is identical with the righteous R. Leib Sarah's.

**Friday, September 25, 2020 ---7 Tishrei, 5781**

**Birth of Zebulun**

Zebulun, the son of Jacob and Leah, tenth of the Twelve Tribes, was born on the 7th of Tishrei. He lived to be 110 years old. (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot, remez 162)

**Shabbat, September 26, 2020 --- 8 Tishrei, 5781**

**Temple Dedicated (826 BCE)**

The 14-day dedication festivities, celebrating the completion of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem built by King Solomon, commenced on the 8th of Tishrei of the year 2935 from creation (826 BCE). The First Temple served as the epicenter of Jewish national and spiritual life for 410 year, until its destruction by the Babylonians in 423 BCE.

**Passing of R. Baruch (1791)**

Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Baruch, father of the founder of Chabad, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.