

# Torah Weekly

ת"ב

September 17-23, 2023  
2-18 Tishrei, 5784

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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## Are We Destined to Stay the Same?

"It is what it is."

Five words that creep into all sorts of conversation, rearing their ugly head in such a deceptively innocuous way. Whether it's about politics, social ailments, or the bug that flew into your chicken salad, it's everywhere.

One columnist discovered its first known use in a 1949 edition of The Nebraska State Journal, in a column discussing the way that pioneer life molded character: "New land is harsh, and vigorous, and sturdy. It scorns evidence of weakness. There is nothing of shame or hypocrisy in it. It is what it is, without apology."<sup>1</sup>

If you'll ask, most people don't really love the term. "What do you mean, 'It is what it is'?" Are you just resigning to fate?"

So what's the correct approach? Should we be upset at the "It is what it is" people, or do they have a point, after all? Our Torah portion contains the answer.

### The Ha'azinu Exception:

This week's parashah is a beautiful soliloquy from Moses with high rhetoric and song-like meter. The verses are both enigmatic and poignant, as Moses calls upon heaven and earth to bear witness and exhorts the people to follow in G-d's ways. Tipping its cap to Haazinu's profound and moving nature, we find the following Halachah: Whoever is called to read from the Torah should begin [his reading] with a positive matter and conclude with a positive matter.

However, in Parashat Ha'azinu, the first [person called to the Torah] reads until zechor yemot olam.<sup>2</sup> The second begins from zechor yemot olam [and continues] until yarkivehu.<sup>3</sup> [These verses do not speak of positive matter]...

Why is the Torah reading paused at these points? Because these are [verses of] rebuke, [and the intent is that] that they motivate the people to repent.

We take great pains to end any aliyah in the Torah on a positive note, even cutting stories at awkward points if necessary. But Haazinu is an exception because the teshuvah it is designed to evoke is just too important to give up.

Considering the time of year we read this parashah, we can appreciate this

exception even more. After all, Haazinu is always read right around Yom Kippur—a high time for teshuvah if there was any.

But for many, the term teshuvah is either depressing or intimidating. "Repentance" is probably even worse, as it conjures up images of fasting, self-rebuke, shame and guilt.

Is there any positive way to think about teshuvah? Is there a way to imagine teshuvah as something empowering and encouraging, rather than a beat-down from G-d?

### The Inevitable End:

Take a look at this quote from Maimonides: All the prophets commanded [the people] to repent. Israel will only be redeemed through teshuvah.

The Torah has already promised that, ultimately, Israel will repent towards the end of her exile and, immediately, she will be redeemed. While we sit here agonizing over the prospect of "doing teshuvah" and actually changing our ways, here we learn that the ending has already been written it's going to happen. Whether you're ready or not, the Torah, apparently, has already scripted the grand finale, and in the script, it says that we're all going to do teshuvah.

"That Guy"

Let's break that down in more practical terms.

Have you ever heard people say, "I'm just not that guy," "It's just not who I am," or some other form of resignation that declares to the world, "Whatever I am now is who I am forever, and it ain't gonna change"?

You probably have.

You may have even said it yourself at some point.

One person is stuck in a rut in his relationship, resigned to the fact that at least once a week, he's going to be bickering with his spouse, irritated and upset.

Another person is caught in a massive loop of unhealthy eating habits, pounding cheesecake in the morning and downing sugary drinks in the afternoon.

This dynamic plays out regarding religious commitments, too.

"Go to shul every week? Nah, I'm not that guy."

"Bring a kosher meal for a work lunch and garner awkward stares

when I unwrap the less-than-seemingly tuna sandwich? Nope. That's just not who I am."

"So I don't light Shabbat candles on time. You think I should be lighting earlier each week? Come on, it's not happening. It is what it is."

What's the simple answer to all these narratives?

You are that guy! Who ever said you're not? Which author wrote your book and already sold it on Amazon, never to be changed? No one, of course! This is a story that you've created in your head, and guess what? It's simply not true.

In an alternate script, in the Torah's script, you, me, and everyone else have already made the decision to do teshuvah. That whole "I can't do the kosher tuna lunch" thing is a false narrative, and it absolutely is not what it is. The Torah has a different narrative waiting for you, already now, even before you've realized that you can be different.

Go ahead and follow that script.

By Aharon Loschack

## Find Yourself

The song of Haazinu—the song Moses sang to the Jewish people on the final day of his life, the song that encompasses all of Jewish history, from the "days of Did G-d just chance upon the Jews? yore" to the future redemption—begins with a description of the great kindness that G-d did for the Jewish people. G-d protected them in the desert and gave them His most precious treasure—the Torah. As Moses tells the people in the beautiful, poetic language of Haazinu:

He [G-d] found them in a desert land, and in a desolate, howling wasteland. He encompassed them and bestowed understanding upon them; He protected them as the pupil of His eye.<sup>1</sup>

Most of this verse is clear: "He encompassed them"—G-d surrounded the children of Israel in the desert and protected them with the "clouds of glory." "Bestowed understanding upon them"—He gave them the Torah. But what is the meaning of "He found them in a desert land"? The word "found" implies that the finder found something unexpected. Did G-d just happen to find the Jews roaming in the desert? Did He not take them out of Egypt and lead them into the desert Himself?

Rashi, the primary Biblical commentator, explains that G-d did indeed find the unexpected in the desert, in the Jews' expression of profound faith in G-d when following Moses into an inhospitable desert and accepting the Torah. As Rashi explains:

He found them in a desert land: G-d found them [the children of Israel] faithful to Him in a desert land, for they accepted His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke upon themselves—something that Ishmael and Esau did not do,

In a desolate, howling wasteland: An arid, desolate land, a place of howling jackals and ostriches. Yet even there, the children of Israel were faithful. They did not say to Moses, "How can we go out into the desert, a place of drought and desolation?"

In the desert G-d found the unexpected; He found a people that was committed to Him and believed in Him, in a way that was beyond reason.

Many relationships are rational. People fall in love because they mutually benefit each other. There is a give and take. Many relationships are rational which makes the relationship beneficial for each partner. But then there comes a time when, for the relationship to survive, what is necessary is not calculated love, but a love and commitment that is beyond the rational relationship.

Every relationship begins with two happy partners who both feel that they are gaining something from the relationship. But what separates the enduring relationship from the transient one is that somewhere along the way, a deeper, unexpected commitment is "found." At some point, the partners look at themselves and are surprised at the level of

feeling and connection they feel, a connection and commitment that is beyond the give and take of investment and reward. When a couple "falls out of love," when the reason for the initial attraction no longer exists, the relationship will not endure unless a deeper connection was "found" along the way.

When people become parents, they are often overwhelmed with love and devotion to their baby. But no matter how great the love is then, at some point later in the child's life, there is usually a surprise. The parents are surprised to have found a devotion and commitment to their child that is far greater than what they ever could have imagined.

The same is true about our relationship with G-d. Initially, the connection between G-d and the Jewish people was a contractual one, where each party was supposed to give something in return for what they would get. G-d would redeem the people from Egypt, bring them to their ancestral land, the Land of Israel, and in turn, the people would uphold their part of the deal by keeping the Torah. This was a reasonable deal for both parties.

But then the unexpected happened. In the desert, G-d found a deeper dimension of the relationship. In the desert, G-d discovered the Jewish people's loyalty when they followed Moses into the frightening desert, beyond the dictates of reason.<sup>2</sup> This was no longer a calculated relationship. The people dug deep within their Initially, our connection with G-d was a contractual one hearts, and found within themselves a commitment to G-d that was deeper than they had ever anticipated.

The portion of Haazinu is read in proximity to Sukkot, the festive seven-day holiday that follows Yom Kippur and is an expression of the deep joy in our connection with G-d. Celebrating in the sukkah, commemorating G-d's placing our ancestors in sukkahs as they left Egypt, we "find ourselves," just as G-d "found" the Jews in the desert. When we leave our home to dwell in the sukkah, we leave behind the notions of self that limit us. We realize that within each of us there are hidden, unexpected treasures waiting to be mined and discovered.

We each contain infinite hidden strength, courage, kindness and holiness. As we begin the new year, as we sit in the sukkah celebrating G-d's embrace, let us surprise ourselves: let us find our true selves.

*By Menachem Feldman*

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, September 17, 2023-2 Tishrei, 5784**

**First Shabbat (3760 BCE)**

Today marks the first Shabbat, when G-d rested after creating the world for six days:

**Monday, September 18, 2023-3 Tishrei, 5784**

**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 19, 2023-4 Tishrei, 5784**

**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. Passing of R. Simcha Bunim of Peshis'cha (1827) R. Simcha Bunim of Peshis'cha (1765–1827) was a disciple of R. Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, the "Seer of Lublin" (see entry for 9 Menachem Av), and of R. Yaakov Yitzchak, the "Holy Jew" of Peshis'cha, whom he succeeded as rebbe. His major disciples included R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk and the first Rebbe of Ger, R. Yitzchak Meir Alter.

**Wednesday, September 20, 2023-5 Tishrei, 5784**

**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.

**Thursday, September 21, 2023-6 Tishrei, 5784**

**Rebbetzin Chana (1964)**

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

**Friday, September 22, 2023-7 Tishrei, 5784**

**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 23, 2023-8 Tishrei, 5784**

**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**

Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Baruch, father of the founder of Chabad, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. 1791.

**Massacres at Babi Yar (1941)**

On 29–30 September (8–9 Tishrei), 1941, German forces aided by Ukrainian collaborators massacred over 30,000 Jews in the Babi Yar ravine near Kiev, Ukraine.