

# OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM

*by Shlomo Katz*

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**Haazinu**

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Today's Learning:

Megillah 2:4-5

Orach Chaim 325:5-7

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nedarim 80

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bava Kamma 37

R' Avraham Shimon Halevi Ish Horowitz z"l (1876-1943; Mashgiach in Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin in Poland) used to urge his students to study this week's parashah, Ha'azinu. After all, the Torah commands (31:19): "Write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, place it in their mouth" - i.e., this song must be fluent and regular on the lips of Israel.

He would say: If the Jewish people would remember the words of this song, which has within it the entire course of events in This World and the World-to-Come, there would be no room for the filth of This World to enter the heart. "Please, my students, learn this song with the explanations of the Sages and the masters of the Divine inspiration," he would repeat. "Sing this song with a pleasant tune, for every nation has a national anthem, and we, the holy nation which Hashem has chosen, have been given the anthem of Ha'azinu."

Through the words of this song, one can attain faith in, and also understanding of, the way G-d directs the world towards the ultimate tikkun / completion. The words of this song include everything from the giving of the Torah to the resurrection of the dead - everything that will happen to us over time. In the words of the Sages in the midrash Sifrei: "This song is great, for it includes the present, the past and the future; This World and the World-to-Come." (Naharei Eish)

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"Listen, heavens, and I will speak; and may the earth hear the words of my mouth." (32:1)

"Hear, heavens, and listen, earth . . ." (Yishayahu 1:2)

The midrash notes that the word "listen" ("ha'azinu") implies that the listener is standing nearby, while the word "hear" ("tishmah") implies a listener who is farther away. Thus, Moshe, who was "closer" to the heavens than to earth, said "Listen, heavens . . . and let the earth hear." The prophet Yishayahu, who was closer to earth than to heaven, reversed the pairings of the verbs and nouns.

R' Moshe Feinstein z"l explains: "Heavens" refers to the nation's leaders, while "earth" refers to the common man. In Moshe's time, the leaders were righteous, and Moshe could speak to them and entrust them to carry his message to the people. In this sense, Moshe was close to the "heavens."

However, Yishayahu lived in a generation when the leaders were evil. (One example of this is Yishayahu's grandson, King Menashe, who killed his grandfather rather than listen to his rebuke.) Yishayahu could not take his message to the leaders; he had to speak directly to the common-folk. Yishayahu was close to the people -- the "earth" -- and he spoke to them, "Do not do all that your so-called leaders do, for they do not follow the Torah, and you should not follow their example." (Darash Moshe)

At first glance, writes R' Shmuel Bornstein z"l, it is difficult to see how the heavens and earth can be witnesses, when they do not speak. Nevertheless, the heavens and earth can bear witness, as we see in the following midrash:

"R' Meir said, 'In the beginning when the Jewish people were meritorious, they testified for themselves. Later, when Bnei Yisrael degraded themselves, the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin testified for everyone. Even later, the prophets had to testify for everyone. After that, the heavens and earth had to testify.'" The Midrash continues in this vein until it reaches the small ant, which now "testifies" for everyone.

What does this mean? Kohelet (8:1) states, "A person's wisdom lights up his countenance." When a person purifies himself, a certain radiance appears on his face, not unlike the rays of light which surrounded Moshe when he came down from Har Sinai. This is the "testimony" that Bnei Yisrael provided for themselves. However, when Bnei Yisrael sinned, only the worthier tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin could still "testify" in this way. Later, only the prophets merited this shining countenance. Even later, when prophecy ceased, the heavens and earth took their place, in that the continued

existence of the heavens and earth testifies to the fact that the Jews are keeping the Torah.

In light of the above idea, adds R' Bornstein, we can understand why the source for the mitzvah of reciting "Birchot Ha'Torah" / The Blessings for Torah Study is found for the first time in this parashah, near the end of the Torah. The Avnei Nezer [a major 19th-century posek and R' Bornstein's father] said that the purpose of Birchot Ha'Torah is to introduce G-dliness into Torah study by distinguishing that study from the pursuit of ordinary wisdom. However, R' Shmuel notes, this only became necessary as Moshe was about to die; as long as he was alive, Hashem's "voice" emanated from Moshe's throat (Chazal say), and the radiance of Moshe's countenance left no doubt as to the G-dliness of the subject matter. It is only we who must recite the berachot in order to sanctify our Torah study. (Shem Mi'Shmuel 5672)

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## Eating on Erev Yom Kippur

"It is a day of complete rest for you and you shall afflict yourselves; on the ninth day of the month in the evening - from evening to evening - shall you rest on your rest day." (Vayikra 23:32)

The gemara asks: "Do we afflict ourselves (i.e., fast) on the ninth (of Tishrei)? We fast on the tenth! However, the verse is telling you that if one eats and drinks on the ninth, it is as if he fasted on the ninth and tenth." (Yoma 81b)

Several explanations have been given for the mitzvah to eat on Erev Yom Kippur:

Rashi writes: Prepare yourself on the ninth so that you will be able to fast on the tenth. (Commentary to Yoma 81b)

Rabbenu Yonah z"l (12th-13th centuries; Spain) offers three explanations (the third of which is the same as Rashi's):

- (1) Eating on the ninth shows one's joy that the day of his atonement has come, which proves that he has been worried until now about the sins that he has committed.
- (2) It is extremely meritorious to rejoice over the mitzvot, and this is why we have festive meals on all of the holidays. Since we cannot do so on Yom Kippur, we do so on the preceding day. (Sha'arei Teshuvah IV, 8-10)

In Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shevitat Asor ("Laws of Resting on the Tenth," where the laws of Yom Kippur are codified), there is no mention of a mitzvah to eat on the ninth of Tishrei. The only place where Rambam alludes to such an obligation is in Hilchot Nedarim 3:9 ("Laws of Vows"), where the question arises: If a person vowed to fast every Sunday, Tuesday or certain other day of the week, and Erev Yom Kippur falls on that day, should he fast or is his vow void? (According to Rambam, he should fast.)

Why does Rambam omit this law from his discussion of the laws of Yom Kippur? R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l explains:

In the Laws of Shabbat, Rambam writes that the Sages prohibited handling certain objects on Shabbat (i.e., items that are muktzeh) so that even unemployed people can refrain from "working" on Shabbat. Otherwise, there would be nothing to distinguish these people's weekdays from their day of rest.

In the same way, explains R' Soloveitchik, if one does not eat on the day before Yom Kippur, it cannot be said that he has fasted on Yom Kippur. There is not, however, a separate mitzvah to eat on the ninth of the month, and therefore Rambam does not mention it. (Quoted in Harerei Kedem)

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The following letter was written by R' Yisrael Salanter z"l (died 1883) and is printed in Ohr Yisrael, No. 15. The letter is dated on this day in 5637/1876.

The foundation of the days of repentance is to accept upon oneself to abandon sin. This is the most difficult of all the tasks that we have on Yom Kippur. The weightiest sin of all is theft, as Chazal said, "Of a box full of sins, which one accuses first? Theft."

Man must seek [ways] to repent on Yom Kippur, especially from the most serious sins. What is "serious" depends upon the circumstances; the easier a particular sin is to avoid, the more serious the sin is considered to be and the greater is the punishment. This is what Chazal meant when they said, "The punishment for not wearing the white strings of the tzitzit is greater than the punishment for not wearing the techelet / blue string." The severity of a sin also depends on the identity of the victim; for example, stealing from a poor person is worse than stealing from a wealthy person . . .

The same is true with regard to other sins, including bittul Torah / neglecting Torah study. The easier it is for a person to study -- for example, on Shabbat, when one is free -- the greater is the sin of not doing so. Likewise, the sin of not studying that which one needs to know in practice is greater than the sin of not studying other Torah subjects . . .

One needs to search his ways and make a strong commitment -- in almost every area of his life -- to guard at least from those things that are easy to avoid. In this way, one's teshuvah will cover the majority of his deeds. Rambam teaches that sins are not weighed by their quantity, but rather by their quality; one sin that was easy to avoid counts more than several sins that were difficult to avoid. Also, within each sin, there are aspects that are easier to avoid than others . . .

[Finally,] one should study mussar works that speak of the severity of bittul Torah . . .

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

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