

PARASHAT HAAZINU

by Shlomo Katz

Marion and Sam Markovitz
in memory of their fathers
Yisroel Moshe ben Zvi Dov Markovitz a"h
Rabbi Yitzchok Mordechai ben Avraham Gross a"h

Aaron and Rona Lerner
in memory of Feiga Reva bas Yoel Aharon a"h
(Fay Lerner)

Today's Learning:
Yadayim 3:4-5
O.C. 277:4-278:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Temurah 5
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 19

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 this song must be fluent and regular on Israel's lips.

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, reiterated R' Horowitz, one can attain faith in, and also an understanding of, the way G-d directs the world toward 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)

May likchi / my teaching drop like the rain, may imrati/ my utterance flow like the dew. (32:2) What is the difference between a lekach / teaching and an imrah / utterance? Also, why is one likened to the rain and the other to the dew? R Shaul Broch z"l (Hungarian rabbi; died 1940) explains:

There are two kinds of derashot / Torah lectures that one can give. One type is intended to teach people and to rebuke them. The other type is intended simply to relate pleasant Divrei Torah and to demonstrate the beauty of the Torah.

A derashah which conveys mussar / rebuke is not enjoyed by all equally. It is like rain, which farmers appreciate and travelers resent. This type of derashah, therefore, is referred to as a teaching [which] drops like rain. (Dropping likewise connotes a harsh action.) Why is this type of derashah called a lekach? The Hebrew root which shares the same letters as lekach means, to acquire. One who gives rebuke is referred to as acquiring souls, as we read in Mishlei (11:30), "A wise man acquires souls." The word "imrah" nearly always refers to softly spoken words. (See Rashi to Shmot 19:3). Thus it refers to the other kind of derashah, which flows gently and is beloved by all, like the dew. (Ke hayom Timza un)

And He will atone for admato / His Land and His people.

Moshe came and he spoke all the words of this Song . . . He said to them, Apply your hearts to the words that I testify against you today, with which you are to instruct your children, to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah" (32:43-46)

Why, immediately after completing the Song of Ha'azinu, did Moshe warn Bnei Yisrael once again to be careful to perform all of the words of the Torah? R Eliyahu Hakohen Ha'itamari z"l (Izmir, Turkey; died 1729) explains:

The word admato" / His Land" has the same letters as dalet amot / four cubits. Thus, the verse, He will atone for admato / His Land and His people" alludes to the gemara's statement (Ketubot 111a) that when one walks four cubits in Eretz Yisrael, all of his sins are forgiven. The gemara there likewise states that if one is buried in Eretz Yisrael, it is as if he is buried under the altar (apparently a good thing). These statements can lead a person to become complacent. Why observe the mitzvot? I will live as I see fit and the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael will guarantee my atonement. No! says Moshe Rabbeinu. True, He will atone for His Land and His people." Nevertheless, Apply your hearts to the words that I testify against you today," instruct your children regarding them, and Be careful to perform all the words of this Torah." Why? Because, says the next verse, Through this matter shall you prolong your days on the Land to which you cross the Jordan to possess it." If you sin, you will be expelled from the Land and will not attain the atonement you took for granted. (Semuchin L'ad)

Hashems portion is His people . . .” (32:9)

R Shalom Shachna Friedman z”l (1771-1813; early chassidic rebbe) taught: In essence, all Jews are of one root; only in their physical existence do they differ. Thus, he who hates one of them hates them all, and he who loves one of them becomes one with them, both with their bodies in this world and their roots in the heavens above. (Quoted in The House of Rizhin p.101)

Return, O Israel to Hashem, your G-d, for you have stumbled through your iniquity.” (From the haftarah)

Commentaries ask: The phrase, "You have stumbled through your iniquity," is an oxymoron. "Stumbling" implies an inadvertent or unintentional transgression, while "iniquity" implies wickedness.

R Chaim Zvi Teitelbaum z”l (rabbi of Sighet, Hungary; died 1904) answers: The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot teaches that every person must ultimately give a judgment and accounting" for his actions. What are these two concepts: judgment and accounting? The Vilna Gaon explains that "judgment" refers to the fact that man will be called to task for every sin he committed. "Accounting" refers to the fact that man will have to answer for the time and energy that was wasted while he sinned, time and energy that could have been used for constructive purposes. It turns out that a person who sins must repent twice - once for the sin he committed and again for the mitzvah that he failed to perform. It is to this that our verse refers: "You have stumbled through your iniquity" - You have inadvertently failed to perform a mitzvah because you were preoccupied with your intentional sin.

R' Teitelbaum continues: In this light we can understand a teaching of the Gemara about repentance. The Gemara says that when one's teshuvah is motivated by fear of punishment, his intentional sins are converted into unintentional sins. However, when one's teshuvah is motivated by love of G-d, his intentional sins are converted into mitzvot. How so? When a person's teshuvah is motivated by fear, he regrets sinning, but that's all. However, when his teshuvah is motivated by love of G-d, he not only regrets sinning, he regrets not performing mitzvot, which would have drawn him closer to G-d. Therefore, he is credited as if he did perform those mitzvot. (Atzei Chaim)

Letters from Our Sages

This week's 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. And, the weightiest sin of all [which is most difficult to abandon] 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 parts of the Torah . . .

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 . . .

One should study mussar works that speak of the severity of bittul Torah . . .

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