

# *Parashat Ha'Azinu*

## פרשת האזינו

Book of Deuteronomy

This week's portion contains the closing poem of the Book of Deuteronomy (ספר דברים) and indeed of the entire *Torah*. This intense poem contains an overview of the history of the people of Israel from the viewpoint of the Israelites on the verge of entering the Land of Israel. Poetry in general (when we are open to it) and specifically Biblical poetry has the power to influence the deepest recesses of our soul. While we need poetry all year round to lift our spirits, we need it even more so during these Ten Days of Awe (from *Rosh HaShanah* through *Yom HaKippurim*).

מה טובו אוהליך יעקב....

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob....

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לפני "ידיד נפש":

It is a challenge to utter proclamations that are simultaneously intended for the "heavens" and "earth"; it is a challenge to choose words that are at once lofty and exalted, cardinal and profound – and at the same time, simple and mundane.

There are those who choose to focus their words totally on spiritual matters and those who focus on more day-to-day matters.

Moses said "האזינו השמים – ותשמע הארץ" (Give ear, ye heavens.....and let the earth hear"). From his words, the listener may infer deep spiritual themes, but may also come away with simple and practical advice. These words, intended for everyone, adapt themselves to the character and nature of the listener.

This is the power of speech; the power behind these beautiful words:

"האזינו השמים, וְאֶדְבַּרְהָ; וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ, אִמְרֵי-פִי."

Give ear, ye heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth

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My moderating words this evening are taken from the poetry of *Parashat HaAzinu* and from this week's *Haftarah* from the book of Hosea (הושע).

1. יַעֲרֹף כַּמָּטָר לִקְחִי, תִזֹל כַּטַּל אִמְרָתִי, כְּשֶׁעִירָם עָלֵי-דְשָׁא, וְכַרְבִּיבִים עָלֵי-עֵשֶׂב.

My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herb

2. הַצּוֹר תָּמִים פָּעֵלוּ, כִּי כָל-דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט: אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאִין עֹל, צְדִיק וְיֶשֶׁר הוּא.

The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He

3. זָכֹר יָמוֹת עוֹלָם, בֵּינוֹ שָׁנוֹת דֶּר-וְדָר; שְׁאַל אֲבִיךָ וְיִגְדֶךָ, זְקֵנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְךָ.

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask thy father, and he will declare unto thee, thine elders, and they will tell thee.

4. וַיַּרְכִּבְהוּ עַל-בְּמִתֵּי אֲרָץ, וַיֹּאכַל תְּנוּבוֹת שְׂדֵי; וַיִּנְקְהוּ דָבֵשׁ מִסַּלֶּע, וְשֶׁמֶן מִחֲלָמִישׁ צוֹר.

He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he did eat the fruitage of the field; and He made him to suck honey out of the crag, and oil out of the flinty rock;

5. שׁוּבָה, יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַד, יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ, בְּעוֹנֶיךָ. קָחוּ עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים, וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל-

יְהוָה; אָמְרוּ אֵלָיו, כָּל-תַּשָּׂא עוֹן וְקַח-טוֹב, וַיִּשְׁלַמָּה פָּרִים, שְׁפָתֵינוּ.

Return, O Israel, unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast stumbled in thine iniquity

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6. מְשׁוֹבְתָם - אֶהְיֶה, נִדְבָה: כִּי שָׁב אִפִּי, מִמֶּנּוּ. אֶהְיֶה כִּטֵּל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, יִפְרַח כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה;  
וְיִד שְׁרָשָׁיו, כְּלִבְנוֹן. יִלְכוּ, יִנְקוּתָיו, וַיְהִי כְזֵית, הוֹדוּ; וְרִיחַ לוֹ, כְּלִבְנוֹן.

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.

7. יָשְׁבוּ יֹשְׁבֵי בְצֵלוֹ, יַחֲיוּ דָגָן וַיִּפְרְחוּ כַגֶּפֶן; זָכְרוּ, כִּי יוֹן לְבָנוֹן.

They that dwell under his shadow shall again make corn to grow, and shall blossom as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.

8. אֲנִי כְבֹרֵשׁ רַעֲנָן - מִמֶּנִּי, פְּרִיִךְ נִמְצָא.

I am like a leafy cypress-tree; from Me is thy fruit found.

9. מִי חָכֵם וַיִּבֶן אֱלֹהִים, נְבוֹן וַיִּדְעֵם: כִּי-יִשְׁרִים דְרָכֵי יְהוָה, וַצַּדִּיקִים יִלְכוּ בָם, וּפְשָׁעִים,  
יִכְשְׁלוּ בָם.

Whoso is wise, let him understand these things, whoso is prudent, let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, and the just do walk in them; but transgressors do stumble therein.

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*Devar Torah* (דבר תורה)

*Shabbat Shuvah*, during which we read *Parashat Ha'Azinu* this year, is the first *Shabbat* of the year. This ostensibly shows that the effort that man must make in order to go back to his roots, where the power of renewal lies hidden, is actually the act of returning, returning to the place from whence we came. This may sound simple, but is actually far from it – especially in the Progressive Jewish Communities world-wide.

What is the nature of this return? Does it include renewal as well? Is it feasible to retroactively change positions and opinions of the past without forsaking the insights gleaned from the journey that we are on?

In the *Haftarah* for *Shabbat Shuvah*, "return" is defined as first and foremost the ability to overcome failure.

”שובה ישראל עד ה' אלוהיך כי כשלת בעוונך...”

Return, O Israel, unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast stumbled in thine iniquity

It is as if to say that there is nothing more to sin than failure – which is repairable and pardonable; allowing for reflection and the creation of something newer and more perfect than the flawed original.

In these words "Return, O Israel...", the people of Israel hear echoes of the fear of a man awakening to the serious consequences of his actions and unable to believe that repentance will be either possible or useful.

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In his article on this week's portion, Yerachem Shamshovitz writes that the meaning of true repentance (*teshuvah*) is like entering deep into one's own home, not just coming to the doorstep, but entering into an open and direct conversation with its residents and him/herself, Not just paying lip service;

The prophet Hosea comments on this in chapter 14:

”קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה'”

Take with you **words**, and return unto the LORD;

And I would humbly add....

”קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה' ואל אדם”.

Take with you **words**, and return unto the LORD and to your fellow man

And what are the words that have the power to open the gates and break the lock?

One might assume that the prophet is referring to the unstoppable power of experience and intention, as expressed in prayer and in poetry, to break through these gates – just as we experience this *Shabbat* with the powerfully determined poem *HaAzinu*.

Yet there are those that claim that the means to repentance are good deeds that will serve as man's defender that his repentance was voluntary; and there are those that claim that one must wholeheartedly and clearly confess one's sins in order to root them out.

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This dialogue between G-d through the prophet Hosea and Israel is reflecting the dilemma as to who should initiate the first step on the road to repentance between the nation and its people, between the nation and its neighbors, between the nation and itself and its conscience – its "god" if you will.

This reminds me Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's poem that Bari Shiryon recently put to music:

דרשתי קירבתך, בכל לבי קראתיך ובצאתי לקראתך, לקראתי מצאתיך”

Thus comes *Shabbat Shuvah*, exactly between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom HaKippurim*, to tell us of the simple manner in which we must repent: we must come up to the house and go inside, we must understand and admit that our sins were a stumbling-block for us, and thus, we will return to the place where we will be received cheerfully, honestly and cordially.

יִפְרַח כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה... וְיִהְיֶה כְּזֵית... יִפְרְחוּ כַגְּפֵן... כַּבְּרוֹשׁ כַּעֲנָן

he shall blossom as the lily... and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree.... and shall blossom as the vine.... like a leafy cypress-tree

With wishes for *Teshuvah*  
and Shabbat Shalom!

Nir Barkin Associate Rabbi

*Kehillat YOZMA*

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