



Parshat Ha'azinu

For the week ending 8 Tishrei 5760
17 & 18 September 1999

Overview

Insights

Most of Parshat Ha'azinu is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons heaven and earth to stand as eternal witness to what will happen if the Jewish People sin. He reminds the people to examine world history and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation — that Hashem “pulls the strings” of world events so that Bnei Yisrael can fulfill their destiny as Hashem’s messengers. Hashem’s kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a land of amazing abundance, and for defeating their enemies. But, this physical bounty leads the people to become self-satisfied and over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt their morals. They worship empty idols and indulge in depravity. Hashem will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world. However, the purpose of these nations is as a rod to chastise the Jewish People. When these nations think that it is through their own power that they have dominated Israel, Hashem will remind them that they are no more than a tool to do His will. The Jewish People’s purpose is to make mankind aware of the Creator. Neither exile nor suffering can sever the bond between Hashem and His people, and in the final redemption this closeness will be restored. Hashem will then turn His anger against the enemies of Israel. Hashem then gives His last commandment to Moshe: That he ascend Mount Nevo and be gathered there to his people.

I MAY BE MESHUGA, BUT I'M NO IDIOT

“You ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you, and forgot G-d Who brought you forth.” (32:18)

It’s amazing how you see a whole different side to people when you lend them money. Some people surprise you at how punctilious they are. Others you would have thought beyond reproach prove less than trustworthy.

There was once a man who had borrowed a large sum of money. When the time came to repay it he had no way of returning the sum. He was beside himself with anxiety and approached an old friend with his problem. Said the friend, “You know what you do? When the creditor comes for your money, look at him as though you never saw him before. Let your mouth loll open and your tongue droop out. Roll your eyes around a bit and twitch from time to time. Look straight through him as though he wasn’t there. In other words, pretend to be *meshuga!*”

“That’s a great idea!”

Several weeks later the two friends met again. “How did it go with your creditor?” “I did just like you said. When the creditor came for his money, I looked at him as though I never saw him before. I let my mouth loll open and my tongue droop out. I rolled my eyes around a bit and twitched from time to time. I looked straight through him as though he wasn’t there. He thought I’d gone *meshuga!* It worked like a dream! That was such a great idea! I can’t thank you enough. By the way, do you think you could lend me a thousand dollars for six months?”

“Sure. No problem.”

Six months later, the friend arrived at the door for his money. He knocked on the door. There was a dull animal scratching sound coming from inside. The door creaked open a little and inside he could see his friend, the debtor. His mouth was lolling open and his

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Parshat **Ha'azinu** — 8 Tishrei 5760, 17 & 18 September 1999

tongue had drooped out. His eyes were rolling and he twitched now and then. His eyes were vacant, looking beyond him as though he wasn't there.

"You really are *meshuga*. It's me, you idiot!"

Most of us think of forgetfulness as a curse. As the years draw by, memory tends to become less and less efficient. In old age, it's common to remember what happened in youth as though it were yesterday, but what happened yesterday — that's another matter.

But forgetfulness is not a curse. If not for forgetfulness, we would never be able to survive life's disappointments, much less a tragedy. G-d gave us forgetfulness as a gift. Through the blessing of forgetfulness we are able to pick ourselves up and carry on with the business of living.

Of all his sons, Yaakov loved Yosef the most. Yaakov's favoritism provoked the brothers' jealousy. Eventually this jealousy led to selling Yosef into slavery. The brothers took Yosef's coat and dipped it in blood and brought it back to their father Yaakov. Yaakov supposed that Yosef had been devoured by a wild animal. He rent his clothes and mourned for his son, and despite all that his family could do, Yaakov was

literally inconsolable. He said that he would go down to the grave mourning his son.

G-d decreed that there is consolation only over those who have passed from this world. No such decree exists for those who are still alive. This is why Yaakov was inconsolable. Consolation is only for the bereft, and Yosef was still alive and well and living in Egypt.

In this week's parsha it says: "You ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you, and forgot G-d Who brought you forth."

Forgetfulness is a blessing that G-d gives us so that we can pick up our lives and go on living even after a tragedy. If we could never forget, we could not go on living. If time didn't soften our pain, life would be unbearable.

G-d gave us forgetfulness as a gift. When we take that gift and pretend not to recognize Him, then we are really *meshuga*.

Sources:

The Dubner Maggid as heard from Rabbi Mordechai Pitem

Haftarah: Hoshea 14:2-10, Yoel 2:11-27; Micha 7:18-20

A BURNING SENSATION

An unbelievable sight. A young fellow with all the visible signs of an Orthodox Jew walks into MacTreife's Burger Bar and orders a cheeseburger! He then proceeds to eat it in full view of everyone.

Later he suffers tremendous heartburn from the indigestible fast-food. Much later, however, he suffers an even greater 'burn' in the spiritual department.

The Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is called *Shabbos Shuva, the Shabbos of Return*. The name is taken from the first verse of the Haftarah "*Return O Israel to Hashem for you have stumbled in your iniquity...*"

The Meshech Chochma asks the question, "What does it mean to 'stumble' in 'iniquity'?" If a person is already doing something wrong, how can he make it worse by *stumbling* in it?

There are two aspects to wrongdoing. The offense in itself and the desecration of Hashem's name that may result from it.

It's one thing for a Jew to slink into MacTreife's wearing jeans, in 'plain-clothes.' It's quite another to waltz in wearing full uniform. It's one thing to commit *iniquity*, to give in to one's desires, but it's quite another to *stumble* and desecrate Hashem's name in public.

A Burning Sensation - Rabbi Calev Gestetner