



TORONTO TORAH

PARASHAT HA'AZINU - האזינו

8 Tishrei 5787
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Candlelighting | 7:04 PM

Havdallah | 8:10 PM (50 minutes after שקיעה)

The Concluding Message of the Torah

RABBI ELAN MAZER | דבר תורה



There is something shocking about the way the Torah approaches its conclusion.

Throughout the Torah we have been presented with a choice. Hashem chose Am Yisrael to become His nation, a mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh, a people entrusted with a historic mission. We have travelled from Egypt to Sinai, through the wilderness, and now stand on the threshold of Eretz Yisrael.

And the terms of the covenant appear clear:

“רָאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַטּוֹב וְאֶת־הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת־הָרָע.” “See, I have placed before you today life and good, death and evil.” (Devarim 30:15)

Keep the mitzvot, remain faithful to the covenant, and there will be blessing. Abandon it, and there will be terrible consequences. It sounds like everything depends upon the choice we are about to make.

And then, only a few verses later, Hashem tells Moshe something astonishing. You are about to die—and the Jewish people are going to fail. “הִנֵּה שֹׁכְבִים אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְקִם הָעָם הַזֶּה” “וְזָנָה אַחֲרָי” “You are going to pass away and this nation will rise and turn after foreign gods. They will abandon Me and violate My covenant. (Devarim 31:16)

Not if they sin. They will sin.

And Hashem continues: when the Jewish people enter the land, prosper, eat and become satisfied, they will turn to other gods and break My covenant.

It raises an extraordinary question. If Hashem already knows that we are going to fail, then what is the point of the entire enterprise? Why give the Torah? Why enter into the covenant? Why bring us into the land? Why begin a relationship whose failure is already foreseen?

And it is precisely at that moment that Hashem commands Moshe: “וְעַתָּה כְּתֹב לְךָ אֶת־” “הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת”, Now, write down this song.

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Dedicated by Paul and Chavi Jacobs to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Paul's mother, Pearl Schraub Jacobs, Perel Hadassah bas Yosef, a"h. May her neshama have an aliya.



PARSHAT TRIVIA

- 1 What is Hashem referred to as in this parsha?
- 2 Why was Moshe not allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael?
- 3 When does Hashem say that Bnei Yisrael will turn away from him?
- 4 How is the Torah like rain?
- 5 Who was next to Moshe when he was singing this song?

ANSWERS

- 1 A rock.
- 2 Because Moshe had hit the rock at Mei Merivah instead of speaking to it.
- 3 When they become over-satisfied with the land.
- 4 The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
- 5 Yehoshua.

Returning לפני ה'



RABBI AMI YUNGER | מחשבה

We usually translate teshuva as repentance. But the literal meaning of the word is much simpler: to return. Teshuva is not only about correcting mistakes. It is about returning to the place, identity, and relationship from which we have become distant.

In *Alei Shur*, Rav Shlomo Wolbe develops this idea through the story of Yonah. When Yonah attempts to escape his mission, the Navi tells us:

וַיָּקָם יוֹנָה לִבְרֹחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי ה'

"Yonah arose to flee to Tarshish, from before Hashem."

(Yonah 1:3)

The words require explanation. How could Yonah possibly flee "from before Hashem"? Hashem is everywhere.

Rav Wolbe explains, based on Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, that the phrase **מִלִּפְנֵי ה'** has a particular meaning. Eretz Yisrael is the place of standing *lifnei Hashem*. Yonah did not imagine that he could escape Hashem Himself. By leaving Eretz Yisrael, however, he hoped to leave the unique place of prophecy and Divine encounter, and thereby escape the mission Hashem had given him.

This gives the idea of teshuva a broader meaning. Teshuva means return, and for Am Yisrael that return is not only spiritual. Part of our return to Hashem is the physical return to the place described as **לפני ה'**. Returning to Eretz Yisrael is itself part of the larger movement of teshuva: Am Yisrael returning to its proper place, to live its national life in the Land in which our relationship with Hashem is meant to be most fully expressed.

This is why the language of teshuva and geulah are so deeply intertwined throughout Tanach. We return to Hashem, and we return to our Land. These are not two separate journeys, but two dimensions of the same return. **The teshuva of Am Yisrael reaches its fullest expression when a people returns to its God, its mission, and its home — once again living לפני ה'.**

Rabbah Emunatecha: Believing in You



RABBI ORI IDELS | תפילה

The awareness of *hodah* that we establish for ourselves each morning is vital, yet it is not enough; from there, we must proceed to the next stage—*Rabbah emunatecha* ("Great is Your faithfulness"). There are mornings, and even entire periods, when I wake up and struggle to truly believe in myself. I look in the mirror and say, "Thank You for the gift of life," yet I still feel as though my presence in this world is a wasted *neshamah*. Often, this feeling stems from a setback yesterday or apprehension about the day ahead—about the tasks that await me, which I am not entirely sure I have the strength or ability to endure.

On such mornings, I strive to draw strength to draw strength from the **"רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ, שֶׁהוֹחֵזֶר בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בַחֲמִלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ"**; continuation of *Modeh Ani* Who has restored my soul within me with compassion; great is Your faithfulness")

In his commentary on the Siddur, *Olat Re'iyah*, Rav Kook explains that every single individual possesses a singular *neshamah*, one endowed with a unique mission that only they can fulfill. In the routine rush of daily life, Rav Kook notes, it is difficult to perceive the full depth and quality of the soul. Yet we must know this truth: we are unique, entirely irreplaceable—there is no other person in the world who possesses a soul like ours—and most importantly, this means we possess an indispensable *ye'ud*.

Rav Kook's insight connects directly to the concluding words of *Modeh Ani*: "*Rabbah emunatecha*." This phrase is drawn from the verses in Megillat Eichah (3:22–24):

They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

יְהוָה הוֹדֵשׁ לִּי כָּל יוֹם אֱמוּנָתְךָ

In the Midrash, this verse is cited to describe the benevolence of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who returns the soul in the morning after restoring and refining it throughout the night, like a master craftsman repairing a vessel. Yet there is a deeper layer of meaning here: *Your faith in us is great and steadfast*.

According to the Midrash, a person's soul ascends at night, leaving the physical body in a state akin to death, and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* chooses anew every single morning to restore it within our body. This restoration of the *neshamah* is an active expression of faith—faith that the individual is capable of fulfilling their unique *shlichut*, and that they possess the capacity to rectify their ways and serve Hashem in the day to come.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not guess; if He believes we are capable, it is because He knows it with absolute truth. This realization infuses me with immense strength: every person needs one God Who believes in them, and if you are alive—you have One.

A Point of Reflection for the Coming Week: Whenever you confront a challenge, whether *ruchani* or *gashmi*, remember that you have a singular role in this world that only you can fulfill, and that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* knows you are capable of it. Try internalizing this—it imparts true strength. B'hatzlachah!

The Concluding Message of the Torah

(continued from page 1)

Shirat Ha'azinu is not given despite the knowledge that the Jewish people will fail. It is given because they will fail.

There is a remarkable passage in Masechet Gittin about Nero Caesar when he was on his way to destroy Jerusalem. Nero shoots arrows in every direction, and each one miraculously points toward Jerusalem. He realizes that Hashem has decreed Jerusalem's destruction. Yet when a nearby child quotes a verse indicating that Edom itself will ultimately be punished, Nero flees, converts to Judaism, and according to the Gemara, Rabbi Meir descends from him.

What an extraordinary response. Nero has just discovered that the Jewish people are about to suffer catastrophe—and his reaction is to join them.

Perhaps he understood something profound about the Jewish people. Suffering, destruction, failure does not signal the end of the Jewish People's relationship with Hashem; it defines the depth of its bond.

The Ha'amek Davar makes this point powerfully in explaining the conclusion of Eicha.

We say: "הָשִׁיבוּנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה חֵדֶשׁ יְמֵינוּ כְּקִדְמָה", Return us to You, Hashem, and we will return to You. Renew our days as of old. But Eicha then continues with another final verse:

What Comes Before Teshuva?

RABBI ORI EZRA | אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל



During the Ten Days of Teshuva, we are focused on repentance. We examine our actions, confess, ask for forgiveness, and try to change. Yet during this period, we must ask a fundamental question: What comes first, the individual's teshuva, or our concern for Eretz Israel, its inheritance, and the ingathering of the exiles?

There is no doubt that every individual must do teshuva. But the Torah and the Prophets teach us that the redemption and the teshuva of Am Israel as a whole follow a different order.

In the Torah's words on teshuyourin Parashat Nitzavim, we read: "Hashem your God will bring you to the Land that your fathers possessed, and you will possess it... and Hashem your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children to love Hashem your God." (Devarim 30:5-6)

First comes the return to the Land and its inheritance, and only afterward, the circumcision of the heart.

Yechezkel describes the same process: "I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you to your own land. I will sprinkle pure waters upon you, and you shall be purified..." (Yechezkel 36:24-25)

Here too, the ingathering of the exiles and return to the Land

"כִּי אִם-מְאִסִּים מְאִסְתֶּנּוּ קִצְפֶּתָ עָלֵינוּ עַד-מְאֹד" If You have rejected us, have You been too angry with us, beyond measure?

The Ha'amek Davar explains that, paradoxically, the severity of punishment itself demonstrates that the relationship has not been abandoned. If a master has decided that he no longer wants his servant, there is little reason to discipline him. The intensity of the response demonstrates that the relationship still matters. "Surely You have not rejected us," Yirmiyahu is saying. "And if so Hashiveinu. Bring us back."

That may be one of the most important messages of Shabbat Shuva.

Religion can easily seem transactional. When I am succeeding, when I am keeping the mitzvot, when I feel spiritually inspired—then I imagine that Hashem wants me. When I fail, stumble, or discover that another year has passed and I still have not become the person I wanted to become, I begin to wonder whether the relationship itself has been damaged beyond repair.

Ha'azinu tells us otherwise.

Hashem entered into the covenant knowing in advance that there would be failure. The Torah was written not merely for the Jew we dream of becoming, but for the Jew struggling with the journey.

Teshuva does not begin with the belief that we will never fail.

It begins with the knowledge that even when we do, Hashem has not given up on us—and therefore we must never give up on ourselves.

precede the purification of the heart. Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook explained that this is the plan of redemption: first, the ingathering of Israel to its Land, and from this will come complete teshuva.

This does not mean that individual teshuva is less important. Rather, there is also a general teshuva, the teshuva of Am Israel.

Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap in Mey Marom wrote that the return of Israel to the Land is both "the beginning of the flowering of their redemption" and "the beginning of their teshuva." In contrast to the sin of "they despised the desirable Land," a renewed love for Eretz Israel awakens, and through it Am Israel reaches complete teshuva.

This is especially meaningful in our generation. We are living through the ingathering of the exiles, after Am Israel has returned to its Land and built a state, an army, and national life. Therefore, during these Ten Days of Teshuva, we should ask not only, "What must I change?" but also, "What is the process that Am Israel as a nation must undergo?" Rav Charlap taught: "The degree to which we distance ourselves from exile corresponds to the degree of our connection to Eretz Israel." The stronger our connection to the Land, the further we move from exile.

Our individual teshuva is essential. But in our generation, it must be part of something greater: the return of Am Israel to its Land, its inheritance, and the ingathering of its exiles. This is the teshuva of an entire nation returning to its Land, its destiny, and its mission.

Forgiving a Debt That Was Already Being Repaid

RABBI YEHUDA MANN | הלכה



Question: My friend Reuven owed me money for ten years. Whenever I asked him to repay the debt, the answer was always the same: "Later... later..." Ten years passed, and I had basically given up hope.

During my Rosh Hashanah davening, I thought to myself: "*Hashem, I am going to forgive Reuven's debt, which I probably will never see anyway. In that zechus, please forgive me and inscribe me for a good and sweet year!*"

The day after Rosh Hashanah, on Tzom Gedaliah, I opened my mailbox and discovered... a signed cheque from Reuven for the full amount! But I had already forgiven the debt. **May I deposit the cheque?**

Answer: The question hinges on whether your *mechilah*—forgiveness of the debt—was halachically effective. There are two fascinating issues to consider: **mechilah b'lev**, forgiveness merely in one's heart, and **mechilah b'ta'us**, forgiveness based on a mistaken assumption.

Mechilah B'Lev- According to your description, you merely **thought** during davening that you were forgiving the debt.

The *Ketzos HaChoshen* (12) cites the *Misgeres HaShulchan*, who maintains that *mechilah b'lev* can be effective. According to this approach, the debt may already have been erased, and collecting the money would be problematic.

However, both the *Ketzos HaChoshen* and the *Nesivos HaMishpat*, two of the central authorities in *Choshen Mishpat*, rule that forgiveness merely in one's heart is **not sufficient**. According to their position, no valid *mechilah* took place, Reuven still owes the money, and you may deposit the cheque.

But what if you actually **verbalized** the forgiveness during davening? Now we enter a different sugya: **mechilah b'ta'us—mistaken forgiveness**.

The Rema rules that *mechilah b'ta'us* is not valid. For example, suppose you forgive someone because you were told that he was desperately poor and seriously ill, only to discover that the story was completely false. Your forgiveness was based on a mistaken reality and therefore may not take effect.

However, the mistake must exist **at the time of the mechilah**. If he truly was poor and ill when you forgave him, but the next day recovered and won the lottery, the *mechilah* remains valid.

So what about our case?

I found two approaches among contemporary poskim. **Rav Hershel Schachter** maintains that if Reuven had already written the cheque when the debt was forgiven, the *mechilah* was based on a mistake and the cheque may be deposited. If, however, he only wrote it afterward, the forgiveness had already taken effect.

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein takes a broader approach. The entire *mechilah* was based on the assumption that Reuven had no intention of ever paying. If, in reality, he had been planning and saving toward repayment, that assumption itself was mistaken. Therefore, even if the cheque was written only afterward, the creditor may still collect.

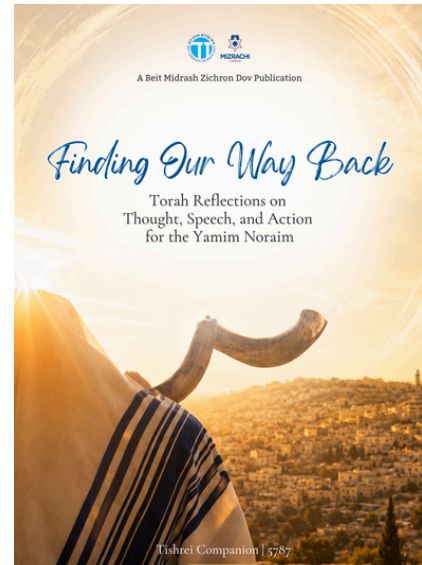
A simple Rosh Hashanah thought can therefore open the door to a fascinating *Choshen Mishpat* question!

This discussion addresses this specific scenario. Any seemingly similar practical case should be presented to a competent Rav with all the relevant details.

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