

PARSHAS HA'AZINU 5778

Parshas Ha'azinu is almost always read on Shabbos Shuvoh. It is the last part of the series of tochocho that started at Parshas Ki Savo.

Rather than summarize the parshah, we will give a running explanation of it.

Moshe Rabbeinu is about to reveal an entire pattern of future Jewish history. He begins by describing his mussar as rain and dew. Even though he is foretelling all manner of tragedies and misfortunes, we can never lose sight of the fact that Hashem is the Tzur, tomim po'oloh. Chazal tell us that "Tzur" connotes the fact that Hashem is the Creator and Designer of the universe.

He is tomim po'oloh in two respects - in the way He runs the world and in the way He created the world. From the very beginning, Hashem imbedded in the creation of the physical world a delicate balance, where everything works together. If one aspect of the universe is changed, it will throw off that finely-tuned equilibrium and will have a negative effect on all the other aspects as well. Hashem's creation is a complete, coordinated system with incredible complexity. It is perfect.

Hashem is also perfect in the way He runs the world. Anything that happens is an expression of justice - mishpot. Evil that exists in this world does not come from Hashem, but from our choices.

The gemara in Bava Metzia says when a person is chayav misoh, Hashem has to take into consideration whether his wife deserves to become a widow and his children deserve to become orphans. When Hashem runs the world, the justice is also incredibly coordinated and balanced to make everything work out justly.

When something goes wrong in the world, it isn't Hashem's fault. It is because people with their free choice choose to corrupt the perfect world that Hashem created with their evil. The gemara in Megilla asks why Klal Yisroel deserved a gezeirah of complete annihilation. When referring to Klal Yisroel, the gemara uses the phrase "soneihem shel Yisroel"- the enemies of Klal Yisroel. This is to convey to us the message that when Klal Yisroel are threatened with troubles and difficulties, it is always because Klal Yisroel are their own worst enemy. Their aveiros bring about their own calamities.

Hashem is yoshor. But when people deal with Hashem in a crooked and deceptive manner, they sow the seeds of their own destruction. This is not how Hashem should be treated. Klal Yisroel has to relate to Hashem in two different ways: as the Creator with a world made with incredible balance and coordination, and as a King who rules the world in a hands-on, detailed manner with complete justice. In that respect, Klal Yisroel is no different than the rest of the world. All humanity will be judged according to this reality.

But in addition, Klal Yisroel was singled out by Hashem to be redeemed from Egypt and brought to Har Sinai to be given the

Torah and Eretz Yisroel. Klal Yisroel should have an additional burden to recognize Hashem's special role in their history and in their destiny. If they appreciated this special relationship, they would not abandon Hashem.

Hashem made us. Chazal make an incredible comment. Hashem created a human being with an aspect of perfection—every limb and organ was designed to fit precisely which what the human being needs to function in an optimal way. The theory of evolution requires positing that the modern human body contains vestiges of earlier stages of its development that no longer serve any purpose. Evolutionists believe human beings carry around with them this extra evolutionary baggage that really hinders their optimal function.

I remember 50 years ago how doctors and biologists couldn't understand the function of the human spleen and would routinely remove people's spleens under the slightest pretext because they thought it was a useless piece of tissue leftover from previous ancestors. Fifty years later we've discovered how the spleen is one of the most vital aspects of healthy human functioning. The arrogance of people comes to the fore when they don't understand every aspect of Hashem's creation and decide we can do without some of it. Hashem in His infinite wisdom designed the human being in a way that he can fulfil the Torah in the ideal way.

What is Jewish history about? These pesukim are the blueprint for the entire pattern of our history—past, present, and future. Chazal tell us an interesting moshol containing a deep idea. Hashem created 70 nations and each nation has a chief angel who was placed in charge of that nation's destiny. When it came to Klal Yisroel, Hashem realized that He ran out of chief angels and decided that He Himself with be Klal Yisroel's guardian. What are Chazal trying to say?

Every nation of the world functions according to certain patterns of behavior and adopt a specific character and national identity. They have certain goals and values with an internal dynamic which determines the rise or fall of that nation. But Klal Yisroel is a nation apart. We are run exclusively by how Hashem interacts with us. Other nations operate with an innate nature and character. Our nation operates with our interaction with Hashem. When historians try to apply the rules of history to Klal Yisroel, they make a basic error of treating us like every other nation. Our national existence comes from our relationship with Hashem.

Right at the beginning, when we were formed as a nation, it happened in a midbor. We had no homeland that we were embedded in. We had no culture that we developed. Hashem created our nationhood out of the bris we made with Him. The French and the English are only able to have a national identity because of the history of that group of people that developed by living on a specific piece of real estate interacting with other

groups living on adjacent pieces of real estate. Our identity has nothing to do with land. Our birth as a nation was at Har Sinai where there was nothing. This is why we are able to survive so long in exile from our land. It is precisely because our nationhood is not dependent on being on any physical place on the globe. The Torah and the bris spans all places and all times in every culture and every environment.

Hashem took us to the midbar—a barren desert—and showed us for forty years that we have no natural explanation for our existence. We only exist because of Hashem's ongoing constant intervention. He brought us to Eretz Yisroel later, after we were given an identity. Hashem wanted us to keep the Torah within the natural world and function as a nation in a natural place in the world. But we could have continued to live in the midbar indefinitely had Hashem chose to do so.

Hashem gave us everything on a silver platter and this is exactly our greatest challenge. We enjoy the excess and the luxury and we slide into overconfidence and self-assurance. We say it's all because of me. It is hard to say that it is really only from Hashem and even harder to live and act by that reality. We start to rebel in two ways. We either say there are other forces that we need to deal with besides Hashem in running the world. This is essentially the concept of avoda zora. Hashem responds with punishments and stripping away the illusions of control that we put on ourselves.

The question of why the Jews in Europe didn't resist the Germans during the holocaust plagues irreligious Jewish historians and philosophers to this day. They come up with all kinds of theories and excuses for our destruction. But this posuk written 3500 years ago already gave us the answer! Just look at Jewish History of the past 72 years. It is clearly Hashem who allows our destruction and enables us to rebuild.

We went through the most devastating churbanos imaginable and time and time again, we were eventually able to pick up and move on and flourish again. No nation has ever survived exile this long and remained with their national identity. No nation has been so constantly persecuted and pursued with such vengeance and bloodthirstiness as we have in golus. What nation ever experienced such a calamity as deep as the Holocaust and in the span of 70 years has been able to rebuild and regain our economic power and political influence in all kinds of ways? How long did it take other nations to recover from disaster? Do they recover at all?

Hashem tells us to look at history staring you in the face. He expects us to see that it is Hashem who is doing it all for us—there is no logical explanation. And yet, when we are at the bottom, we recognize we need Hashem to get back up. But as we climb higher and higher on the ladder of success, we leave Hashem further and further behind.

The Shirah ends with a prediction that after Hashem allows the non-Jews to destroy us, He turns around and punishes them. The question is obvious: aren't these non-Jews merely carrying out Hashem's will? Why are they guilty?

The answer is that the nature of things is that what we represent is really a threat to the rest of the world. Every nation has its culture and lifestyle that is entirely of its own making—following its own lusts and drives. We are a spiritual nation with spiritual values and goals. This idea is very uncomfortable for the rest of the world to confront. We are basically saying to them that their culture and their values are bankrupt and immoral. Hitler Ym"sh wrote that we have to get rid of the Jews because they introduced ideas that were against the natural laws of human so-called civilization. He claimed that the concept of a human

being is an animal who dominates other animals by their brute force and their cunning. The Jew introduced to the world the idea of a conscience and a sense of moral good and evil and the only way to rid ourselves of this idea is to wipe out every last Jew from the planet.

A Jew represents spiritual values and goals in this world – whether Jews don't understand it or don't want to understand it is irrelevant. The world sees that we are different and we pose a threat to their entire way of thinking. So Hashem provides a protective shield to prevent the non-Jews from their natural desire to get rid of us. When we act improperly, all He has to do is remove that protective shield and by instinct, the non-Jews will start to hunt us down and attack us. People don't want to accept this reality of a spiritual nation bringing kedushah into this world. That is why they attack us and this is why they deserve to be punished.

The praise we are given is that despite everything that happened, we survived because we remain connected to Hashem, and Hashem will take vengeance upon the nations who persecuted us.

We are given a very clear overview of Jewish history. What allegiance we owe to Hashem, why we experience persecution and destruction, what is going to be in the end of days. It is all laid out before us in exact detail. It is frightening what happens when we don't fulfill our obligations. Yet, Moshe Rabbenu introduces these events with the hope that his words penetrate like gentle rain. We should be cognizant of the fact that it is all for our benefit.

After Moshe finishes the shirah, he tells Klal Yisroel to pay attention to take your efforts in toiling over the Torah very seriously. It is not an empty thing. Rashi explains: don't think that your struggle to understand the Torah is for nothing. It is amazing: After this entire broad, sweeping vision of human and Jewish history, from creation, to yetzias mitzrayim, kabbolas HaTorah, Eretz Yisroel, churban and geuloh—the basic element of a Jew's existence is learning Torah. It is his life.

There is not one word of Torah which is empty of meaning. This is what gives us security in our land. The posuk tells us that through limud haTorah we will have a long, enduring settlement in Eretz Yisroel. Torah is a protection for everything. But the purpose of Klal Yisroel living in Eretz Yisroel specifically is to create the environment for maximum fulfillment of the Torah.

Parshas Ha'azinu and Shabbos Shuvah sends a powerful message. Hashem gives us opportunities to create brocho for ourselves or the create kolloh for ourselves. All the evil that we decide to do ultimately boomerangs in our face. Our own actions and our own choices become our punishment. It doesn't have to be generated by Hashem. When you remove the protective covering we put up through our Torah and mitzvos, what do you expect will happen? We can expect all the wild animals coming to attack us.

In the end of days it will be good. But what brings security is appreciating the unbelievable depth and value of toiling to understand each word of Torah.

As we approach the Yom Hadin, we mentioned previously, the cheshbon hanefesh one should do differs from group to group. For bochorim learning in Yeshivah, they have to realize that coming to Eretz Yisroel to learn doesn't mean they are spending their "gap year" living out their adolescent immaturity before they go back home to start real life as an adult. Being in a yeshivah means joining a group that is working to grow and

mature together into bnei torah. You are in yeshiva to fashion yourselves and mold yourselves according to Torah ideals and values during the most crucial and pivotal years of your lives.

A famous Hebrew poet, who was in Volozhin in his youth, described a yeshiva as the place where the soul of the Jewish nation is forged. As we proceed to the Yom Hadin we have a simple cheshbon hanefesh to make: How am I using all the opportunities that I am being given by Hashem to fashion myself as a Ben Torah, and to become a member of the nation which is supposed to be a mamleches kohanim and goy kodosh. How? This is the period of life where we are preparing and building a Torah identity that will be embedded in our character for the rest of our lives. It will determine the trajectory of growth in Torah and yiras shomayim that we will be on for decades into the future.

Some of you will remain in the Beis Midrash, other will go out into the world of parnosoh. But regardless of which path is taken, we are forming behaviors and our attitudes towards Torah and davening and dikduk be'mitzvos. We are learning how to daven, learn, think and behave like a Jew should.

The message of the parsha is that our choices are like boomerangs. What we do now will determine what we experience later in the future. Hashem is straight. It comes right back to us. Our cheshbon hanefesh has to be how well we are using the opportunities Hashem gave us for the purposes that He gave them for. He created us for a purpose. He designed our bodies perfectly for a purpose. He gave us financial security and physical comfort for a purpose. How are we using these gifts to serve Him and fulfill the purpose that He wants from us?