

Parshas Ha'azinu has some harsh tochocho – the Heavens and Earth are witnesses to this tochocho. It starts with describing the proper attitude towards Torah.

(ב) יערף כסטר לקחי תנול כטל אחרתי כשעירים עלי דשא וקרביבים עלי עשב:

Torah is not supposed to be a burden or a bother. Torah is like rain and dew – it is what gives life to all living beings.

Rashi explains that Torah isn't incidental to life. It is life itself. A life without Torah is not really living. This is the introduction.

If you feel that Torah is too difficult to keep and is an overwhelming burden that you can't wait to be free from, you aren't looking at the Torah in the right way. You need to appreciate what life is with Torah and what life would be without Torah. It may be difficult and challenging, but it is a wonderful way to live. Mitzvos are a yoke. But if you understand Torah deeply, the yoke is a wonderful thing.

The next posuk has seemingly contradictory explanations.

(ג) כי שם ה' אקרא הבו גדל לא:

Rashi quotes one gemara which says we must respond by giving greatness to Hashem whenever the Shem Hameforesh of Hashem is pronounced. This is one of the high points of the avodah of the Kohen Godol on Yom Kippur – he says the Shem of Hashem during vidui, and all the Jews in the Mikdosh who hear him must bow on the ground and say Boruch Shem.

But there is another gemara. The Ramban in Sefer Hamitzvos says birkas haTorah comes from this posuk. The gemara in Brochos explains that of course we need to give thanks to Hashem for giving us the means to attain olom haboh. If we eat to survive physically we have to make a brocho to show our appreciation. But what gives life to the entire world? What gives us eternal life? The Torah. All the more so we should thank Hashem before we engage in this activity that gives us olom haboh. Therefore, the Ramban concludes that it is a mitzvas aseil to make a brocho before learning Torah. We need to express how wonderful it is. It gives us a beautiful life in this world, and eternal life in olom haboh. This is the introduction to the rest of the tochocho in Ha'azinu.

Chazal say people don't merit to have children who are talmidei chachomim because they don't make this brocho before learning. They don't appreciate what a gift they have been given.

Sometimes we confront Hashem in a true manner when the Shem Hameforesh is mentioned. But most often we confront Him when we learn His Torah.

The next posuk says Hashem made a perfect world.

(ד) הוצר תמים פועלו כי כל דרכיו משפט אל אמונה ואין עול צדיק וישר הוא: (ה) שחת לו לא בניו מוקם דור עקש ופתלתל: (ו) הלה תגמלו זאת עם נבל ולא חכם...

Yes, there is evil. But everything will go perfectly and run smoothly if you listen to the rules. When you don't listen to the rules, you cause your own destruction. Hashem is completely good. He doesn't perpetrate any evil directly.

We see evil in this world, but we also know Hashem causes everything. How do we reconcile this? The Rambam gives an example of two ways to make a table collapse. You can smash it down directly with a sledgehammer, or you can remove one of its legs and it will fall down from its own unsupported weight. Similarly, Hashem never does any evil action. He removes the protection that would otherwise be there to prevent evil forces from attacking us. The evil people take advantage of it and cause evil to happen because we stopped listening to Hashem.

Hashem created Klal Yisroel – look at our entire history.

...הלווא הוא אביך קנך הוא עשך ויכנך: (ז) זכר ימות עולם בינו שנחת דר ודר שאל אביך ויגדך וקנך ויאמר לך: (ח) בהנחל עוליו וגו' בהפרידו בני אדם יצב גבלת עמים למספר בני

ישראל: (ט) כי חלק ה' עמו יעקב חבל נחלתו:

The Sifri explains that Klal Yisroel went down to Egypt with seventy people. These correspond to the seventy nations and their seventy malochim. Each nation has a maloch in shomayim who watches over them and guides their destiny – except for Klal Yisroel. So Hashem said: I will personally watch over Klal Yisroel and guide their destiny. What is the midrash trying to say?

Every nation has its history. Every nation has its culture. Every nation goes through periods where it rises and falls. There are laws of history. In the 1950's there was an English historian who managed to explain how all empires of the world rise and fall by following the various rules of history that he discovered. Except for one nation – Klal Yisroel. We have defied all his rules. He called us living fossils – because according to the laws of history, we shouldn't be around today. He was exactly right – this is what the midrash is saying. Hashem is our guide. He has been providing us with supernatural protection which help us defy the natural laws of history that determine the fate of all other nations.

Spain was once a mighty nation with a great empire. England once ruled the world. But they went into decline and never recovered their former glory. Now they are just ordinary countries. The same is true for all empires throughout history. But Klal Yisroel is different. We keep going. As we will see in another posuk, our history isn't run by a maloch or any natural force. And this special relationship with Hashem was set in place at the very beginning of our history.

(י) ימצאנו בארץ מדבר וברתהו: לל ישון: יסכרנהו: יבוננהו: יצננהו: כאישון עינו:

When Hashem created Klal Yisroel when they left Egypt, He brought them to a completely barren desert. They had only mon for food and a special rock which gave water. They had shelter from special clouds and their clothes and shoes never wore out. They lived on a completely supernatural level on a daily basis for forty years. At the end of this period, Hashem told Moshe to put a little mon in a jar as a reminder for when they go into natural life. They must never forget the hashgocho protis which provided for everything they needed supernaturally for forty years. They must remember that their pamosoh comes only from Hashem all the time – even when living within the natural world and things are more hidden.

Once a year on Succos, we are commanded to go out of our homes and remember how Hashem took care of all our needs in the desert.

(יא) ירכבהו על בקתי ארץ ויאכל תנובת שדי וינקהו דבש מסלע ושמן מחלמיש צור: (יד) חמאת בקר וחלב צאן עם חלב כרים ואילים בני שן ועתידים עם חלב כליות חטה ודם ענב תשתה חמר:

The Jews left Egypt with tremendous wealth. They didn't have anything to spend this money on. All their needs were provided to them for free. They then amassed even more wealth when they conquered Sichon, Og and Midian before entering Eretz Yisroel. They came into Eretz Yisroel with all these resources and all this awareness that everything comes from Hashem. But then we bump into the biggest problem – the human ego – it wants to believe that he is control and he made everything himself.

(טו) וישמן ישראל ויבעט שמנת עבית כשית ויטש א' עשהו וינבל צור ישעתו: (טז) ויקנאוהו כזרים בתועבת וקעיסהו: (יז) ויזכו לשדים לא אלה אלהים לא ידעום חזשים מקרב באו לא שערם אבותיהם:

It is hard for human beings to constantly live with the humbling recognition that they are essentially powerless to achieve anything without Hashem. People naturally try to deny Hashem's involvement in their lives and try to pretend they did it all themselves. Either that, or they look to avodo zoro to believe they can manipulate the spiritual forces which control their lives. These are the biggest nisyonos we have.

(יח) צור ילךך תשי ותשכח אל מחלקך: (יט) ויגרא ה' וינאץ מכעס בניו ובגותיו: (כ) ויאמר

אסתירה פני מהם אראה מה אחריתם כי דור תהפכת המה בנים לא אמן בם: (כא) הם קנאוני בלא אל כעסוני בהכליהם ואני אקניאם בלא עם בגוי נכל אכעיסם:

Hashem gets angry and gets fed up with our lack of appreciation for what He does for us. He starts to take these things away. Tragedies start to happen because Hashem retracts His special protection.

(כו) אמרתי אפאיהם אשבייתה מאנש זכרם: (כז) לולי כעס אויב אגור פון ונקרו צרימו פון יאמרו ידנו רמה ולא ה' פעל כל זאת: (כח) כי גוי אחד עצות המה ואין בהם תבונה:

There is a very important Ramban here which says that Hashem created the world and created human beings on Earth with a neshomo to recognize and connect to Hashem. He gave one nation the job to make sure that the awareness of Hashem and the connection continues in the world throughout history. This nation will always exist to fulfill its mission – despite all the setbacks and problems that arise. There is a guarantee that we will never lose sight of this mission to show the world the true reality of Hashem in this world. We will never forget the Torah – no matter what.

When corona hit and shuls and yeshivos and botei midrash were closing two years ago. I was watching the whole structure of Torah learning just start to collapse. But I knew that we have a guarantee.

We were not able to start the zman in our yeshiva building in Yerushalayim that Elul. We were going to be learning Shevuos and Nedarim in different locations. It was a disheartening situation. But I realized I was learning the same thing that my rebbe and my grandfather were learning under Communist Russia. Despite all the persecutions and attempts to wipe out Torah learning in Russia, they still managed to learn the same Shevuos and Nedarim that we are learning in yeshiva today. It gave me the realization that the same Shevuos and Nedarim was learned by generations before them, and will always be learned by generations after them. We have a guarantee that the Torah will never be forgotten – Klal Yisroel will never lose sight of our mission to bring ruchniyus and connection to Hashem into this world.

Klal Yisroel will always exist and the Torah will always exist because this is the plan that Hashem has for the world, and He will never give up on us.

If Klal Yisroel would just look at Jewish history, they would understand clearly that they need to do teshuvoh and there is simply no alternative.

(כט) לוי חכמו ישכילו זאת יבינו לאחריהם: (ל) איהו ירדף אחד אלף ונשים יניסו רבבה אם לא כי צורם מקרם וה' הסגירם: (לא) כי לא כצורנו צורם ואיבינו פלילים:

The Holocaust was not some aberration in Jewish history – it isn't such a mystery why it happened and how the Jews became so helpless. It was all predicted by the Torah in Parshas Ha'azinu – in these pesukim. Hashem abandoned us and removed His special protection and this made us feel helpless in the face of the enemy. This doesn't excuse the ones who perpetrated this evil. They will certainly be punished when the time comes. He will eventually judge the nations of the world and judge Klal Yisroel.

(לו) כי ידיו ה' עמו ועל עבדיו יתנחם כי יראה כי אולת יד ואפס עצור ועוזב: (לז) ואמר אי צור חסיו בו: (לח) אשר חלכ זבחימו יאכלו ישתנו יין נסכים יקומו ויפזרוכם יהי עליכם סתרה: (לט) ראו עתה כי אני הוא ואין אלהים עמדי אני אמית ואמתה סחצתי ואני ארפא ואין מנדי מצילי:

When we lose all hope and things look so bleak and we feel so powerless, we will finally realize there is no one to rely on other than Hashem.

There is a machlokes in the gemara if the final geuloh will come only with teshuvoh or even without. The Rambam says that there has to be teshuvoh before the geuloh can come. But Klal Yisroel have free-will! What if they decide they won't do teshuvoh? In that case, Hashem will cause things to be so bad for us that there will be no choice but to do teshuvoh.

The Ramban here disagrees and says the geuloh will come without teshuvoh. At the end of days it will be so clear that Hashem is running human history and He will reveal Himself. He will forgive our aveiros even without teshuvoh and this is how the geuloh will come about. All the non-Jewish nations and deniers will finally recognize Hashem.

Rashi says at that time, the non-Jews will see the greatness of Klal Yisroel. Despite their best efforts to destroy them and cut off their connection to Hashem, Klal Yisroel persevered and maintained their connection to Hashem throughout all the persecutions of thousands of years that no

other nation could survive.

Hashem will finally judge the nations who persecuted Klal Yisroel and take His revenge. We will see how Hashem protected and allowed Klal Yisroel to survive all these centuries.

There are two bookends of history. One is the period of intense hashgocho over Klal Yisroel in the desert when we left Egypt. There were open miracles surrounding us at all times for forty years. The other bookend is at the end of days when the final geuloh will come, and the nations will be judged for how they treated Klal Yisroel. It will be open and clear for all to see the special hashgocho Hashem had over us to protect us. But the period in between, in the long centuries of golus, Hashem's hashgocho is hidden. This shiroh is to constantly remind us that Hashem is always there running things behind the scenes and keeping us safe. It predicts that sometimes we will forget and pretend Hashem isn't there and we think we are doing everything ourselves. Then Hashem removes His protection and we suffer persecutions until we remember again and return to Hashem.

Klal Yisroel is being told all this in advance. Know that this is exactly what will happen whenever we forget who we are and we decide to abandon Hashem. But Hashem will never abandon us. This is Moshe Rabbeinu's final message before V'zos Habrocho. You need to teach your children the entire Torah to fulfill it. It is not an empty thing I am giving you.

(מז) כי לא דבר רק הוא מכם.

Rashi explains there is not a word or letter in the Torah that has no meaning or relevance. It is the deepest chochmoh that exists in this world. It is your life. Learning Torah is not an extra thing to life. Through limud Torah we extend our lives in this world. The Mishna in Ovos says that this is what we are created to do. Don't take credit for it. Everything else is a means to this end of limud Torah.

This is the last message Moshe Rabbeinu tells us about life.

It is interesting that in the last nevuah given to Klal Yisroel as prophecy is retreating, we are told in Malachi to remember Toras Moshe avdi. This is how we maintain our connection to Hashem after nevuah departs. When the Shechinoh is leaving Klal Yisroel because of the churbon Beis Hamikdosh, Yirmiyahu says kumi roni balailoh – get up in the night to learn Torah. This is how we can hold on to hashro'as haShechinoh after the Beis Hamikdosh is destroyed.

We are living in dangerous times. When I wake up in the morning nowadays, I'm relieved to see that the world exists and it hasn't come to an end. I have lived to see the entire history of the confrontation between the United States and Russia. Never have I felt that the world is so close to self-destruction as we are now with the United States fighting this proxy war with Russia through Ukraine. The leader of Russia is fighting a war that he can't win and can't afford to lose. His army just lost a major battle and his generals are advising to use nuclear weapons.

At a time that is very dangerous for the entire world, people can't just brush it off by saying Moshiach is coming. We see in this parsha clearly that there will be a terrible reckoning at the time of geuloh – on the nations and on us as well. No-one is spared.

We are davening these days about the din on the coming year. Which nation will have peace and which will have war. No-one last year suspected there would be a serious global crisis like the one we face today with Russia and Ukraine. We sing nice tunes for u'nesaneh tokef and we don't take the din seriously enough. Tens of thousands of people have been either killed or their lives devastated by this war.

In the end of history, Hashem will bring about a dramatic geuloh and everyone will ultimately recognize how Hashem guided the entire process of human history. But in the meantime, we have an obligation to appreciate what Torah is and to utilize the Torah to give us guidance as to how to live our lives. It is the basis of our lives and it extends our lives. This is the final message that Moshe gives us before He departs. Use the Torah to connect to Hashem in every generation.

We are living in dangerous times where the forces of evil are very unbelievably strong. We are approaching a din which is extremely serious and we need to learn the powerful lessons of this parsha. May we be zoche in din and have a g'mar chasimoh tovah.