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8 years of Points to Ponder on Parashas Haazinu

**הַֽאֲזִ֥ינוּ הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם וַֽאֲדַבֵּ֑רָה  Listen Heavens and I will speak (32:1)** - **The Midrash** (Devorim Rabbah 10:1) asks whether it is permissible to treat somebody who is suffering from an earache on Shabbos. The answer provided is that the Sages have taught that saving a person's life takes precedence over the desecration of Shabbos. Why is this the opening Midrash to Haazinu? **Chasam Sofer** explains that there is a Machlokes as to whether a person is permitted to confess his sins on Shabbos. Some maintain that it is permissible since it gives him pleasure to repent and atone for his transgressions, while others forbid it because the focus and emphasis on his misdeeds causes him anguish. However, on the Shabbos preceding Yom Kippur, which has the power to rectify all of the Shabbosim of the previous year (Mishnah Berurah 603:2), the confession is classified as Pikuach Nefesh (life-saving) and permissible according to all opinions. Moshe died on Shabbos. He spoke out Haazinu the same day. Ergo, Haazinu was said on Shabbos. The Midrash is noting that in the same way one might hear painful rebuke causing him ear pain of a spiritual type on Shabbos, one may also confess on Shabbos.

**הַֽאֲזִ֥ינוּ הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם וַֽאֲדַבֵּ֑רָה Listen Heavens and I Shall Speak (32:1) – Rav Elchanan Wasserman ztl.** once began a Shabbos Shuva Derasha with the question of How could Moshe, the great Anav speak with such seeming arrogance? He explained that the answer is in the next Possuk – Ki Shem Hashem Ekra – when I offer Dvar Hashem it is not my words but rather those of Hashem – and therefore worthy of being heeded to even by Shomayim and Aretz.

**הַֽאֲזִ֥ינוּ הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם וַֽאֲדַבֵּ֑רָה** Listen O Heaven (32:1) – **R Mordechai Kreiger z”l** suggested that this Possuk was Moshe’s way of speaking about the Torah. When he spoke of Shomayim, he was referring to Torah Sh’B’Ksav which is straight from Shomayim. When he spoke of HaAretz he referred to Torah Sh’Baal Peh which is studied and plowed through by the Chachamim to derive the proper learning method. Even critical Berachos for daily living all have their source from the Torah.

**יַֽעֲרֹ֤ף כַּמָּטָר֙ לִקְחִ֔י תִּזַּ֥ל כַּטַּ֖ל אִמְרָתִ֑י Dew and rain (32:2) -  Rashi** notes that like the rain that never stops Torah too will never cease. However, the comparison to rain seems misplaced. Isn’t it the DEW that never stops? Why  bother with the rain comparison? **Rav Eliyahu of Izmir (Minchas Eliyahu)**  explained that since Torah goes with the person when s/he passes it remains with him/her forever. If Torah would only be compared to dew, the person would think that like dew, Torah  is always around and there is no urgency to study and observe it. Thus, the double reference, we need to go at Torah life hard like rain and know that it is with us forever like the dew.

**יַֽעֲרֹ֤ף כַּמָּטָר֙ לִקְחִ֔י My lesson will drip like rain (32:2)** - The Midrash (Pesikta) notes that those who study Torah are like the fish who rush to catch the new drops of rain all while being surrounded by water. Talmidei Chachamim rush to learn a new insight despite their immense knowledge too. **Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel ztl.** added that the comparison is even deeper. Like the fish who keep seeking newness even in the water that is already in the sea, Talmidei Chachamim use the new ideas to add a freshness into the Torah that they have already acquired and mastered.

**יַֽעֲרֹ֤ף כַּמָּטָר֙ לִקְחִ֔י תִּזַּ֥ל כַּטַּ֖ל אִמְרָתִ֑י May my teaching drip down like the rain ..like storm winds on vegetation (32:2) – The Sifrei** deduces the responsibility for us to assemble our words of Torah into principles and details instead of seeing Torah as a bunch of minute details. Travellers do not take small bills with them on trips. They take large bills which can be exchanged for smaller bills as needed. **Ramchal** adds that when something is organized it helps make each detail more pleasant to learn.

**כִּ֛י שֵׁ֥ם ה֖ אֶקְרָ֑א When I call Hashem’s name (32:3) – Rav Schachter Shlita** would note to us that this is the source of the responsibility to recite Birchos HaTorah before one learns. The **Maharsha** explains that the reason for this is that all the names of Hashem are found in the Torah and it is really a description of Godliness. If so, we can also understand why it is so that the Gemara (Nedarim) notes that the first Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because they did not make Birchos Hatorah. Why was this such an Avaira? The **Ran** explains that they didn’t make a Beracha means that they treated Torah like a secular discipline. Rav Schachter added that although one finds many descriptions of Hashem’s sovereignty in the secular study of His world, there is a difference in the attitude toward secular study versus that of the study of Torah which is our life and the basis of our existence.

**הַצּוּר֙ תָּמִ֣ים פָּֽעֳל֔וֹ   The deeds of the mighty rock are perfect and just (32:4)** – what does this mean**? Rav Schachter Shlita** pointed out that usually when one metes out justice, it cannot take society and the collateral damage into account. However, when it comes to Hashem, he is able to take everything into consideration and Ein Avel - it never ruins His plan.

**הַצּוּר֙ תָּמִ֣ים פָּֽעֳל֔וֹ   His works are perfect (32:4) - Rav Shimon of Yaroslav** noted that the reason he merited a long life was that when people complain about unfairness in the world, Hashem takes them into Shomayim and shows them how and why things happen and why it is just. He added that he never complained so he didn’t need to be shown why it was just. **Rav Dr. Abraham J. Twerski ztl.**  added that this is a great story but it also contains a tremendous amount of truth within it. The danger of stress and tension often lead people to be on tranquilizing medication. These meds often depress the brain and make it less sensitive to reality. Tranquility from Bitachon is far superior to that which is accomplished by medication and promotes longer life.

**קֵ֤ל אֱמוּנָה֙ וְאֵ֣ין עָ֔וֶל The god of faith (32:4)** - The **Sifrei** notes that Hashem believed in this world and created it. **Rav Aharon Kotler ztl**. added that by nature, creations have an inclination to sin and deserve destruction. Here Hashem did the world a favor and created the concept of Teshuva before the creation of the world on faith that the world deserves to continue despite its errant actions. Hence the wording -- He is the Hashem of faith without evil -- meaning that he sees beyond the evil having prepared for prior to the creation of the world. (Maybe that’s why when we recite the Avodas Yom HaKippurim we begin with the creation of the world as it is the start of the Teshuvah process which inclues the Avodas Yom HaKippurim <JS>).

**עַ֥ם נָבָ֖ל וְלֹ֣א חָכָ֑ם A nation that is defiled and not wise (32:6)** **- Onkelos** noted that Moshe called  us a nation that received the Torah but was not wise enough to listen to it. Where did he get this idea from? **Rav Schachter Shlita quoted Rav Kalmanovitz ztl**.who noted that like a Neveila that held onto life and lost it, a person or nation that gets life through the Toah should not lose it due to negligence.

זְכֹר֙ יְמ֣וֹת עוֹלָ֔ם **Recall the days of old (32:7)** – When we read of the Yimos Olam the recollection is in the singular language. However in the years of each generation it is in the plural. Why? **Rav Yehonasan David Shlita** suggested that when it comes to the beginning of time, the Mishna suggests that you can only explain it to a single student. But the history of generation to generations can be studied by the masses together.

**שְׁאַ֤ל אָבִ֨יךָ֙ וְיַגֵּ֔דְךָ  Ask your father and he will tell you (32:7) - Rav Schachter Shlita** would regularly remind us that the Midrash notes that Yitzchak began his Beracha with the same word that Avraham ended his. Yaakov did the same with the words Yitzchak ended. Moshe began with the words that Yaakov ended and Dovid began with the words that Moshe ended. Rav Schachter explained that the Midrash is teaching us that each generation learns from and emulates the practices of the previous generations. It does not mean that we use the exact expressions but that modern practices of each generation should be connected with those of the earlier generation.

**יִמְצָאֵ֨הוּ֙ בְּאֶ֣רֶץ מִדְבָּ֔ר He will be found in the desert (32:10) - The Lomza Mashgiach, Rav Moshe Rosenstein HY”D** noted that one really tends to find Hashem in those trying moments in life when he has no one else to rely upon or trust except Hashem. He added that this is why the Torah was specifically given in the desert -- in order to demonstrate that Bitachon in Hashem is strongest in these times and is the key to success in life.

**ה בָּדָ֣ד יַנְחֶ֑נּוּ**  **Hashem guides us alone (32:12)**- The Gemara (Chagigah 3a) notes that when we say Shema, we note the Echad – unique nature of Hashem. Similarly, when we declare Mi K’Amcha Yisrael Goy Echad, we are noting that we too, are a unique nation. While we live in isolation, it is precisely BECAUSE of our uniqueness. **Rav Schachter Shlita** would often comment that while the nations of the world are created in the image of Hashem, only Bnei Yisrael are referred to as Banim. It is the reason our take on world events is often different than those of the rest of the world. We are Badad – unique.

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**וַיִּשְׁמַ֤ן יְשֻׁרוּן֙ וַיִּבְעָ֔ט Yeshurun got fat and he rebelled (32:15) - Sforno** comments that even the Torah dedicated, who delve into the depths of Torah, can unfortunately become swayed by the riches of this world and rebel against our real purpose in this world. After this happens, Hashem hides his face in order to get us to see what the real point of everything is**. Rav Elya Svei ztl.** noted that when Hashem gives us economic prosperity after Tzaros -- we might think that we are entitled to it. However, economic downturns get us to see that either we turn to Him and move to act in the way He would want us to, or we will have no one to blame for the destruction except ourselves. Either way, the goal is to get us to turn back to Hashem.

**צ֥וּר יְלָֽדְךָ֖ תֶּ֑שִׁי וַתִּשְׁכַּ֖ח קאֵ֥ל מְחֹֽלְלֶֽךָ You are unmindful of the Rock that fathered you, and have forgotten God who formed you (32:18) - Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ztl**. noted that there seem to be 2 separate issues with the one who serves Avoda Zara -- that he forgets Hashem and that he serves foreign Gods. While the latter seems to be missing in modern society on the whole, the forgetting of Hashem -- the lack of awareness of His presence in our daily lives is a serious matter. The Achilles' heel of the modern religious person is this existential awareness of God's Presence in his daily life.  We know the answers to the questions, and we know that He is there. But we need to make sure that we never forget that.

**צ֥וּר יְלָֽדְךָ֖ תֶּ֑שִׁי You were unmindful of the Rock Who bore you, and forgot God Who created you (32:18)** - What type of forgetting is the big Avaira here? **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ztl.** explained that the forgetfulness described here comes from the awareness of God's existence, but without influence on his lifestyle or his day-to-day activities. In a certain sense, modern man is faced with the problem of the forgetfulness of *Ha’azinu*. A modern person may be aware of God's existence in the general sense, and if prodded indications of His existence he might be able to shake layers of dust off his faith and answer. However, this shallow knowledge has no impact on his life or his behavior. Although he knows that God exists, he does not act accordingly. He ignores the Torah lifestyle and observance that this knowledge is meant to bring with it.

**צ֥וּר יְלָֽדְךָ֖ תֶּ֑שִׁי You were unmindful of the rock who bore you and forgot Hashem who sustains you (32:18) – Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ztl.** explained that there are 2 processes of forgetfulness that lead to sin. In Parshas Eikev the forgetfulness is active as the person tries to select a different Avodah Zara instead of Hashem. The forgetfulness described in Parashat Ha’azinu is of a different type. Here, the forgetfulness comes from awareness of God's existence, but not follow through with the ramifications of this knowledge. The person does not allow his knowledge of God's existence to influence his lifestyle or his day-to-day activities. "And Yeshurun grew fat." This draws his attention away from any sort of spiritual reality – "and he kicked." This person knows that God exists – perhaps he would even profess to believe in Him – but his life is nevertheless considered one of "sacrificing to demons, non-gods." He serves success and prosperity, setting aside no time for developing a spiritual personality. In short, this is modern man’s Avodah Zara.

**וַיַּ֥רְא ה וַיִּנְאָ֑ץ מִכַּ֥עַס בָּנָ֖יו וּבְנֹתָֽיו** **Hashem saw and turned away in disdain from the anger of his children (32:19)** – Later it says Harninu Goyim Amo Kee Dam AVADAV Yikom. Yet, the Talmud notes that when we follow the words of Hashem, we are called Banim and when we do not, we are called Avadim. Why here does it seem to be the opposite? **Rav Asher Weiss Shlita** explains that there is a powerful lesson here – when Hashem gets angry with us, he is doubly hurt in that we are also his children (so how could we sin so terribly). At the same time, while moving back into the position of strength, Hashem remembers even the Eved and will avenge even the distance between us.

**כִּ֣י ד֤וֹר תַּהְפֻּכֹת֙ הֵ֔מָּה** **They are a generation of reversals (32:20)** – Although the simple meaning of the possuk is in the negative, **Rav Yaakov Bender Shlita** told the story of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld ztl. who responded to an insolent comment toward Rav Kook ztl. about Shmittah by explaining that there will be a generation in the future whose upbringing is not to be the rejection of Torah and Mitzvos which was the cornerstone of the secularist movement. Sure enough, it came to be – the movement to be Shomer Shmittah K’Halacha is a proud declaration throughout Eretz Yisrael.

**הֵ֚ם קִנְא֣וּנִי בְלֹא־אֵ֔ל They have caused me to seem jealous [as they pursue] non-gods, they have angered me with their nonsense, and I will make them jealous with a non-people, I will make them angry with a foolish nation (32:21) – Ramban** explains that the reference to the nation is the Kasdim. What gave them the unique opportunity to ruin the Jewish people? **Rav Zevulun Charlop Shlita** explained that they were a rootless people whose style was to steal the style of the people in whose midst they lived. **Rav Yaakov Neuberger Shlita** added that this nation and its style were created by Hashem specifically to go after a nation that is uninterested in its own grand legacy.

**אֲנִ֧י אָמִ֣ית וַֽאֲחַיֶּ֗ה I put to death and I bring life (32:39)** – Hashem is the source of Refuah. **Rav Yechezkel Abramsky ztl.** noted that when we have the opportunity to attribute our recovery to someone other than Hashem – like doctors and hospitals and medications, it is especially incumbent to recognize that He is the one in charge. Hence, when we daven we note that Hashem should heal us, “because He is our praise” – that here in particular, it is important to praise Hashem.

**כִּֽי־אֶשָּׂ֥א אֶל־שָׁמַ֖יִם יָדִ֑י For I shall raise my hand to heaven (32:40) - Rav Moshe Hager, Viznitzer Rebbe ztl.** noted that when one raises his hands is a reference to Tefillah. In this section, we are told that our Tefillah should be primarily motivated by a desire to seek to increase Kavod Hashem (the Anochi in the world) We learn that the Shechina shares our pain and if we daven for the Shechina’s pain to end, our pain will end as well.

**בְּעֶ֛צֶם הַיּ֥וֹם הַזֶּ֖ה And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the middle of his day saying (32:48) - Rashi** comments that this is one of the three verses in the Torah employing the term in the middle of the day, in this case to highlight that Bnei Yisrael would not be able to stop it. **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** Points out that this is how we are to respond to the death of a Gadol. The intensity of the pain needs to make us lose our senses and cry out that if we could have done something about it we would have.

**בְּעֶ֛צֶם הַיּ֥וֹם הַזֶּ֖ה In the midst of this day (32:48) – Rashi** notes that the phrase B’Etzem HaYom appears three times in the Torah. Each time it was to show that no one could stop it. This time it would be the Bnei Yisrael who might try to stop the death of Moshe. How would they think to be successful? **Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz ztl.** opines that it would be through their Tefillos that they would try to stop the decree. **The Brisker Rav ztl**. suggested that by simply blocking his ascent up the mountain, they could thwart death since Moshe was to ascend the mountain in order to pass.

**וּמֻ֗ת בָּהָר֙ אֲשֶׁ֤ר אַתָּה֙ עֹלֶ֣ה שָׁ֔מָּה And die on the mountain you are ascending (32:50) – Rashi** comments that this death would be similar to the death of Aharon which Moshe so desired. What was so special about the death**? Rav Nebenzahl Shlita** explained that the actual entire death was a fulfillment of Mitzvos. Aharon was commanded to stretch his hands, close his eyes etc. Moshe too, would fulfill the words in his death by ascending the mountain and following the words. (A similar thought is expressed in the name of the Ponovezher Rav)

**כַּֽאֲשֶׁר־מֵ֞ת אַֽהֲרֹ֤ן אָחִ֨יךָ֙ You will die on the mountain as Aharon your brother did (32:50)** - Why the reference to Aharon? **Rav Gifter ztl.** explains that Aharon’s death was done with his awareness that he was fulfilling the will of Hashem until the last moment. Moshe wanted the same type of death -- with the awareness that he too, was fulfilling the will of Hashem in his death. Rav Gifter adds that most people are not granted that opportunity.

**Haftorah**

On the surface, the song of the Haftorah which is a song of praise is wildly different from the song of prophesy that is Haazinu. Why then is it chosen as the appropriate one for the Haftorah this week? **Rav Gideon Weitzman Shlita** suggested that the song of praise and the song of prophesy need each other. Mundane praise is raised as a result of the prophesy. Yet prophesy is connected to the people who use it to direct their awareness and sing praise. The prophesy takes the word of Hashem to us, the praise song, allows us to reconnect to Him.

**נַחֲלֵ֥י בְלִיַּ֖עַל Torrents of godless men (Shmuel Bet 22:5) - Rav Dovid Feinstein ztl.** noted that Bliyal is a contraction of the words Bli and Ol or without a yoke. People without any scruples and no connection to Hashem are often the ones who wreak destruction on the Jewish people hardest.