

בס"ד



Parashat Ha'azinu

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

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The Equation of Life

Parshas [Haazinu](#)

Rabbi Pinchas Winston

EVERY GENERATION HAS its own tests. I would have liked to believe that having actual prophets of God to tell us what God was thinking and planning to do would be enough to straighten out the crookedness of any generation. But then I read the Prophets and found out that many *nevi'im* had been largely ignored by the people, and that the people even invented false ones to contradict them. If prophets didn't

work, then how will looking at the calamities of past generations, as this week's *parsha* tells us to do, make a difference, *especially* today?

You don't even need a verse to instruct us to do that. Who doesn't compare what is going on today to the Jews to what happened to them back in the 1930s? What we need is a verse or two to explain why, despite the obvious comparisons, we don't learn the obvious lessons? People see reason for concern today, but with only a few exceptions, most Jews still throw caution to the wind.

The answer is actually mathematical. There are all these "constants" on the left side of the equal sign, like mortgaged homes, good jobs, large families, high standards of living, lots of good kosher restaurants, etc., in the Diaspora. All of this, of course, is followed by the mathematical symbol that says, "does not equal *aliyah*."

But wait...there seems to be this variable in the equation that, during better times, no one seems to pay attention to. It's called Anti-Semitism. When it is minimal, then "does not equal *aliyah*" remains the answer. When it starts to grow, then "does not equal *aliyah*" starts to become less so, and when it grows so much that we start to lose our mortgaged homes, good jobs, etc., (God forbid), then "does not equal *aliyah*" transforms into "must make *aliyah*."

The question a Jew has to ask themselves then is, *how* much Anti-Semitism is *too* much Anti-Semitism?

But wait, it turns out there are other variables that need serious consideration as well. For example, travel arrangements. Today, when a Jew wants to travel, they can

arrange almost everything online and within days, perhaps even hours. But when chaos starts its reign, will that still be so?

Today, when a Jew travels in most parts of the world, they do so with minimal fear and interference. Will that still be the case when entire governments have turned against the Jews, as is already happening?

Today, when we want our money from financial institutions, we just ask for it. How much longer will we be able to do that if Jews are divested of their rights (like the Japanese Americans were during World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor)? Hyperbole? Actually, *Jewish history*. AI will tell you the same thing.

But wait a moment again. We've left out the most important variable of all that the Torah has been focusing on the last few *parshios*. It's not the Anti-Semites we have to worry about. It's not travel restrictions that we have to worry about. It's not even the losing of our money that we have to be concerned about. There is only one variable that needs to concern us: *Hashgochah Pratis*—Divine Providence, because that is the variable that controls all the others.

If you were paying attention in *Mussaf* on Rosh Hashanah, we included the dramatic prayer, *Unesaneh Tokef*. It's when we intoned how it is God and *only* God who determines who will live and who will die, when, and how. Everyone else and everything else are just the means at His disposal to carry out His decision for individuals and the nation as a whole. Whether a Jew will have to run and hide is up to Him, and

whether or not a Jew will run and hide successfully is His decision, and *only* His decision.

That being the case, the only question we actually need to answer is, why *should* He save us... besides our wanting to be saved? That reason alone did not work for so many in the past, so we shouldn't count on it in the future.

Well, how about something we say every weekday morning in *Shacharis*:

God of Hosts, fortunate is the man who trusts in You (Tehillim 84:13). God, deliver [us]; the King will answer us on the day we call" (Tehillim 20:10).

As it says, if you want God to answer on the day you "call," you have to already be one of those people who have trusted in Him for everything until that time.

Easier said than done, especially after so many years of "natural" success. For us, it's like telling someone who doesn't have money, a job, or a degree to get a good one that if they just go and make a couple of million dollars, they'll be financially secure. As I said, much easier than it sounds.

There are some people in the world who not only know what trust in God means, they actually have it. And more than likely, they've never been on the cover of a magazine discussing the top 500 companies.

But that's changing. If history goes as it has in the past and is promising to in the future, a Jew's greatest asset will be trust in God. Moshe Rabbeinu, in this week's *parsha*, called Heaven and Earth to bear witness to the fact that perfect trust in God is the be-all and end-all for every Jew. It was the same Heaven that we live under today and the Earth that we walk on all the

time. And they're about to step forward one last time with their ancient testimony in modern times about what Jewish life is really about. Are you ready?

Happy Endings

Parshas [Haazinu](#)

Rabbi Aron Tendler

On Yom Kippur we read the story of the Ten Martyrs. Rabbi Akiva was among those ten great personalities who died sanctifying G-d's name. The Talmud in Berachos 61b relates that as Rabbi Akiva was being tortured to death, his students saw him reciting the Shema with joy, seemingly oblivious to the pain he was enduring. The incongruity of the moment was so apparent that even Tyrnus Rufus, the Roman commander who had ordered the execution, asked Rabbi Akiva how he was able to laugh in the face of such horrendous torture. Rabbi Akiva's students, who were equally amazed at their teacher's endurance, understood the moment to be far more profound than mere stoic courage and endurance. They asked their beloved teacher, "Is the Mitzvah of reciting the Shema incumbent upon an individual under such dire circumstances?" Rabbi Akiva explained. "The Torah commands us to love G-d with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our belongings. All my life I wondered whether I would ever fulfill this Mitzvah of loving G-d with all my soul. Now that I have been granted the opportunity of loving G-d with my very life, should I not do so with joy and exultation?"

As a nation that has survived millennia of persecution and suffering, we have a fascination with how our heroes have died and how one should die. In the aftermath of the Swiss Air tragedy, a Talis was found floating in the ocean. Tragically, Mr. Klein, a “frum (observant)” man, was a passenger on that fateful flight, and it was his Tallis that had been recovered among the wreckage. Mr. Klein’s children confirmed that their father never placed his Talis and Tefilin through the regular baggage service but always carried them with him on board. The problem was that it was nighttime when the flight crashed into the Atlantic and the Talis, which is usually not worn at night, should have been enclosed in its zippered velvet “zekel – bag” which was inside a zippered plastic cover. How did Mr. Klein’s Talis get out of its bag? The children surmised that in the six minutes before the crash, when the passengers knew that the plane was in trouble, their father, knowing that the situation was serious took out his Talis and put it on. That is the way a true “Eved G-d – Servant of G-d” prepares for possible disaster – wrapped in his Talis and immersed in Tefilah – prayer. It is fair to assume that Mr. Klein’s final words, like Rabbi Akiva’s, were “Shema Yisroel...”

Moshe Rabbeinu said this week’s Parsha in the final hours of his life. Moshe knew that he was about to die, and the final two Parshios of the Torah, Haazeinu and Zos Habracha, record his last words, thoughts, and feelings. So, how did Moshe die? The final moments were recorded in the Medresh as “the kiss of G-d.” However, far more fascinating than his actual death were the moments preceding that final kiss.

In last week's Parsha, Vayelech 31:2, Moshe said to the Bnai Yisroel, "I can no longer come and go, and G-d has told me that I am not to cross over the Yarden." Rashi explained that Moshe was physically capable of coming and going as well as crossing over the Yarden. As the Torah attests (34:7) Moshe was 120 years old... his eyes had not weakened and his vigor had not diminished." The meaning of Moshe's words, "I can no longer come and go," was, "I am not capable of leading you across the Yarden into the Promised Land because G-d did not give me permission to do so."

My Grandfather ZT'L asked, if Moshe was physically capable of coming and going but would not do so because G-d had not given His permission, why didn't Moshe simply say, "I can't lead you because G-d did not give me permission" Why did he say, "I am not capable of coming and going?"

My Grandfather ZT'L's answer illuminates Moshe's unique attitude at the time of his death. Moshe was able to come, go, and cross over the Yarden. He was the picture of health, and he had the same prodigious strength as when he was in his prime. The reason Moshe said that he was not able to come and go is that he was not able to go against G-d's wishes. His understanding of G-d's mastery over every atom of the universe made it impossible for Moshe to not listen to G-d's commandments. For Moshe, not listening to G-d was tantamount to drinking poison or putting his hand in fire. The same natural aversion we would have to drinking poison or grasping a red-hot iron was the degree of Moshe's aversion to not listening to the commandment of G-d.

Moshe may have been the only person in the world to have been granted power over the Angel of Death. My Grandfather explained that Moshe did not have to die. He was given free will over death! However, because G-d commanded him to die, Moshe willingly and joyfully ascended Har Nebo.

As Rashi explains in Zos Haberacha 34:1, "To ascend Har Nebo should have required many steps but Moshe jumped them all in a single bound." For Moshe it was a last opportunity to do the will of G-d, therefore, he ran to do it!

So, how does such a man prepare for death? This week's Parsha is a glorious symphony of joyous exaltation. Moshe sang forth his love for G-d, his love for his nation, and his love for G-d's Torah. Moshe's strong voice must have enveloped the Bnai Yisroel in an uplifting embrace of intimacy and hope. As the Jews faced Moshe's eminent death and struggled with their own fears of abandonment and loneliness, Moshe's harmony and melodies reached in to the depths of the nation's heart and soul with love and longing. So, how did Moshe prepare for death? Moshe Rabbeinu sang a song of creation and renewal, truth and hope. Moshe called upon heaven and earth to witness the triumph of divine justice over mortal man. Moshe sang forth a challenge to his people to rise above their own limited mortality and become greater than the angels. "...It is the name of G-d that I proclaim, Ascribe greatness to our G-d!" (32:3) So, how did Moshe prepare to die? He prepared himself wrapped in love, longing, obedience, happiness, joy, and song.

Blessing on the Torah

Written by Anonymous

Our sedra sees the biblical source for making a bracha on the Torah (32;3 – ‘when I call out the name of HaShem ascribe greatness to our G-D’) – gemarra brachos 21a. Therefore, it seems like making a bracha on the Torah is a mitzvah from the Torah. However, the RambaM does not include it in his sefer hamitzvos for biblical mitzvos, and the RambaN asks why on earth the RambaM misses out this mitzvah??? The Aruch HaShulchan answers that the Rambam does indeed hold that birkas hatorah is a torah mitzvah. Just the reason he did not include it separately in the sefer hamitzvos is that the Rambam holds that it is part of the mitzvah of learning Torah. We see from here that part of Talmud Torah is making a bracha on the Torah – ie that part of learning torah is appreciating that the Torah comes from HaShem and is a spiritual document of Higher Knowledge. This is why, says the sefer hachinuch (430) we make a bracha on the torah before learning but birkas hamazon is after eating. Because food is physical and we can get full and thanks HaShem after eating, but Torah is spiritual and we can thank HaShem before learning it. That’s why, the gemarra says (nedarim 81a) the reason we got kicked out of Eretz Yisrael at the churban habayis rishon is that we didn’t make the bracha on the Torah first, ie we did not appreciate the Torah as from HaShem. **BOTTOM LINE MESSAGE – appreciate Torah!!!!!!!!!!!! .**

Gratitude Never Fades

Written by Daniel Shasha

There is something very puzzling about the Torah’s treatment of Amon and Moav, compared to the other nations who harmed *Klal Yisrael*. Amon and Moav are prohibited from marrying into our nation because

they didn't greet us with bread and water when we left Mitzrayim, and they hired Bilaam to curse us. Yet, Edom and Mitzrayim, despite the terrible things that they did to us, are permitted to marry into *Klal Yisrael* after three generations (23:4–8).

Surely, this is very perplexing. Didn't these nations treat us harshly as well? Edom denied us access to their country, even though we offered to purchase food and drink from them, and they even threatened to wage war against us. Then, there were the Egyptians, who enslaved us, threw our baby boys into the Nile, and subjected us to terrible suffering. So, why is Amon and Moav's lack of kindness viewed much more severely? The *Ramban* (23:4) explains that Amon and Moav were both descended from Lot, whose life was saved by Avraham, who acted with incredible self-sacrifice to rescue him from captivity. Amon and Moav should have shown gratitude to the descendants of the one who had saved their ancestor's life. Instead, they turned against us. Because of this lack of gratitude, they are prohibited from entering our nation.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz explains that this teaches us something fundamental about who we are as Jews. Gratitude is not simply a nice character trait. It is an essential part of what it means to be a Jew. Therefore, a nation that doesn't have this quality is incapable of joining *Klal Yisrael* since this is the antithesis of what we stand for (*Da'as Torah, Beiurim* 23:40). In fact, Chazal teach that we are called *Yehudim*, from the word *hodaah*, to thank, because gratitude is so deeply connected to our identity (*Midrash Shir HaShirim Zuta* 1:1).

In contrast to Amon and Moav, Edom and Mitzrayim are allowed to marry into our nation after three generations. Regarding Mitzrayim, the Torah says, “*Lo teta'ev Mitzri, ki ger hayisa be'artzo*”—“You shall not despise an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land” (*Devarim* 23:8).

This is astonishing. After everything the Egyptians did to us, including enslaving us and throwing our baby boys into the Nile, how can the Torah tell us not to despise them?

Rashi explains that despite everything they later did to us, we must remember that they provided us with a place to live during a time of great difficulty: “Because they provided you with a place to stay in a time of great distress”. (*Rashi, Devarim 23:8*)

The message is so powerful. The Egyptians did terrible things to us, but that does not erase the good they once did for us. In reference to this, Chazal (*Bava Kamma 92b*) say the following dictum: “We should not throw a stone into the well from which we drank.” Even when someone has subsequently hurt us, we do not erase the good that they once did for us. We are still expected to remember it and have *hakaras hatov* for it. Klal Yisrael were hosted in Egypt for many years, and it was there that we grew into a nation of tremendous size. Whatever else happened later, we must still remember the kindness of having been given a place to live when we needed it. The Torah is teaching us that gratitude does not disappear simply because circumstances later changed.

This is a very important lesson for us today. We should strive to remember the people who have helped us, the places that have given us opportunities, and the kindnesses that have been done for us, even when many years have passed. We may have different views from someone who helped us, or our relationship with them may have changed, but that should not cause us to forget the good.

This idea also displays the importance of feeling gratitude towards our home country. We might have different views and live different lifestyles yet we need to appreciate the fact that we are able to live there.

Several years ago, the renowned Torah scholar Rav Ben Zion Kook, Rosh Beis Hora'ah HaKlali in Yerushalayim and a close talmid of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l, was visiting the Lakewood Yeshivah. Hundreds of bachurim and avreichim gathered to hear him deliver a shiur and share memories of his revered rabbi, whom he had served closely for many years.

The Bachurim were asking the Rav questions and, in passing, one of them mentioned that it was America's Independence Day. Rav Kook then shared a broader lesson about our attitude towards America. He explained that Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Elyashiv referred to the United States as a "Malchus Shel Chesed, a kingdom of kindness." It is a place where Jews were able to seek refuge from the horrors of Europe and are freely able to practice Torah and mitzvos. The Rav emphasized, "The Jews of Eretz Yisrael, and certainly the Jews of America, must show hakaras hatov to this Malchus Shel Chesed."

Cherished Children

Written by Daniel Shasha

We are told in this week's *parashah*, "You are children to Hashem your G-d... a treasured nation" (Devarim 14:1–2). The *Torah* is teaching us something profound: our status as Hashem's "treasured nation" begins with the fact that we are His children. One of the greatest privileges we have is that we are chosen, treasured, and beloved by Hashem. He has given us the *Torah* and the extraordinary opportunity to have a relationship with Him, enabling us to live lives filled with purpose, meaning, and spirituality.

Although we comprise less than 0.2% of the world's population, we were chosen to be Hashem's treasured nation. What an extraordinary gift! Out of billions of people, the King of the universe chose us to be His representatives in this world. We should pause and truly appreciate what that means. A loving parent cares deeply for his children, loves them unconditionally, and constantly looks out for their well-being. So too, Hashem is our loving and caring Father. He watches over us, cares about

us, and desires what is best for us. We should never allow the incredible privilege of being Hashem's children to become something we take for granted.

A remarkable story brings this idea to life.

A frum Jew was once in business with a Jew from Ra'anana who had little Jewish background. They had an important business meeting in China on Sunday, so they arrived on Thursday. The frum partner suggested, "Since we don't have anything planned until next week, why don't we spend Shabbos together?"

"But what do I do?" his partner asked. "What is Shabbos?"

Patiently, he explained what Shabbos was all about, and his partner agreed to try it. There was, however, one concern. They were staying on the seventeenth floor, and he could not imagine spending an entire day without using electricity, especially the elevator. The frum Jew explained that before Shabbos they would take the elevator down to the lobby, have their Shabbos meal there, and then walk up the stairs only once, when they were ready to go to sleep. The next day, they would walk down once and spend the rest of Shabbos in the lobby.

"Okay," he agreed.

As they were sitting in the lobby on Friday night, they struck up a conversation with another guest, who turned out to be the hotel manager. When he heard that they were Jewish, he became very emotional.

"You're the children of G-d," he said. "The Chosen Nation. How fortunate you are."

He continued speaking with great admiration about the Jewish people. During the conversation, they casually mentioned that because it was Shabbos, they could not use the elevator.

"Don't worry," the manager replied.

He immediately called over several of his workers. To their amazement, the strong hotel staff picked up their chairs and carried them all the way up seventeen flights of stairs. They did it because, as the manager explained, “These are the children of Hashem.”

The experience made a tremendous impression on the not-yet-frum Jew. He could not stop thinking about what had happened. He told his family how he had been treated with such honor simply because he was a Jew. More than anything, it caused him to begin asking himself a powerful question: What does it truly mean to be a child of Hashem?

He began learning more about *Yiddishkeit* and gradually started living a life of *Torah* and *mitzvos*. Today, he supports many important *Torah* institutions and continues to inspire others through his remarkable journey.

Perhaps this is one of the messages we should take to heart as we approach the month of Elul. Being Hashem’s children does not mean that we will never make mistakes. It means that even when we do, we always have a way back.

Hashem grants us the incredible gift of *teshuvah*—the opportunity to leave our mistakes behind, repair our relationship with Him, and begin the new year with a clean slate. A loving parent does not stop loving his child when the child makes a mistake. On the contrary, he longs for his child to return to the right path and is eager to welcome him back.

Lehavdil, this is how Hashem relates to us. He is our loving Father, patiently waiting for us to return to Him. He does not push us away because of our mistakes; He allows us to come closer.

As we prepare for the *Yamim Noraim*, may we strengthen our awareness of the extraordinary privilege of being Hashem’s

cherished children. May this realization fill us with confidence, gratitude, and a renewed desire to draw ever closer to our loving Father. And may we enter the new year not only with a desire to improve, but with the deep awareness that we are always Hashem's children—and that the door to return to Him is always open.

Humor

THE MEMORIAL PLAQUE

A young boy was standing in the synagogue looking up at a plaque that had a lot of names inscribed with flags emblazoned into the design. The Rabbi came over and explained that these are the names of men and women who had died in the service. "Which service," asked the boy, suddenly quite concerned, "Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur?"

THE GYM COMPLAINT

"I signed up for a gym six months ago but didn't lose any weight. I'm going to go in there tomorrow in person to find out what's wrong."

Yom Kippur had just finished, the fast was broken, and the Rebbetzin (Rabbi's wife) dropped into an easy chair saying, "Oy! Am I ever tired!"

The Rabbi looked over at her and said, "During these High Holy Days, I had to conduct 5 special services, go without food or drink, and give a total of five sermons. Why are YOU so tired?"

"My dearest," she replied, "I too had to fast and sit through all that. But in addition, every minute I had to sit in the front row, beam with pride and pretend to be impressed!"

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In a Conservative shul there once was a Congregation President who was a nice businessman but Jewishly, well, he was "ritually-challenged." On Rosh Hashanah the Rabbi offered him an aliyah. The President said, "As you know, I'm not very observant, and I wouldn't want to take the honor from someone else."

The Rabbi responded, "You're the President, everyone wants to see you honored."

Panic-stricken, the President said "No no, no, I can't read the Hebrew blessings, I'll embarrass myself."

The Rabbi said: "As President, you HAVE to take at least this honor!"

The President thought and then he said, "Isn't there anything where I don't have to talk?"

The Rabbi thought for a minute and suggested "How about *Gelilah*?"

"What's *Gelilah*?" said the President?

"Simple," replied the Rabbi, "you just come up after the Torah is lifted, and when the cover is put on, you put on the breastplate and the crown and then sit down. You can't possibly go wrong."

Relieved, the President accepted the honor.

And so, right after hagbah, the President came up, put on the breastplate and the crown, and went back to his seat.

The Rabbi came running over and said: "NOT ON YOU, put the breastplate and the crown on the TORAH, on the TORAH!!"