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Parshat Haazinu
The Song of the Jewish Future
Rabbanit Miriam Gonczarska - Class of 2015

This year we read Haazinu on Shabbat Shuva, the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is therefore the first *parsha* of the new year 5784 (though it is the second-to-last *parsha* of the Torah). The last *parsha*, V'Zot HaBracha, composed of the two last chapters of the book of Devarim, is read exclusively on Simchat Torah.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “Today is the oldest you've ever been, and the youngest you'll ever be again.” This is true on an individual, national, and even cosmic level. We are at the point in the Jewish calendar when this statement is as relevant as it can be. We take all our experiences to this point from the past and bring them into the future. In a sense, our future is young, as it is the beginning of a fresh new year. Yet we are also heavy with memories and laden with the consequences of the past, decisions both our own and those of previous generations.

During the High Holy Days, when we consider our pasts and dream toward our futures, we focus a lot on the rich poetic liturgy of the *machzor*. The weekly Torah portion is sometimes overlooked. But our *parsha* is in conversation with these times in multiple ways that demand our investigation. Furthermore, from the moment we blow the shofar at the conclusion of *Neilah* on Yom Kippur, we enter a short time of preparation for the holiday of Sukkot. The regular cycle of Torah reading returns only with Parshat Bereishit. This juxtaposition – between Haazinu and Bereishit – also calls for attention.

Haazinu takes us outside of the current local mindset, focused as it is on wishes for a happy new year. It asks us to consider a wider scope of Jewish history and to ponder our final destiny. If we add Parshat Bereishit to this equation (in a reverse order) we are invited to observe history from the inception of the world possibly until the times of *Mashiach*.

Bereishit focuses on the past and is universal. Haazinu, on the other hand, is a prophetic vision about the future. Its focus is on the relationship between God and the Jewish people. One reaches the very edge of the beginning of world, human life, and separation of humanity from God as result of the human expulsion from Gan Eden, which leads to the division between humans and God. The final lines of the Song of Moses, Haazinu reaches out possibly to the end of times, when tension between Jews



and the world around them will reach a peak, and then, as a result of God's intervention, an equilibrium. The Cains and Abels of this world – the persecutors and the victims – will, according to our *parsha*, find the destiny they deserve (Deut. 32: 40-43).

We can't analyze every parallel or contrast between Haazinu and Bereishit, but here are a few. Let us look at the first word of each *parsha*. "Ozen" (from Haazinu) means ear, but "giving an ear," "paying attention," or "listening" doesn't fully contain all its meaning. In the word Haazinu there is also hidden the word "izun" – balance – this same core as in "moznaim," balancing scales, the universal symbol of fairness and the power of justice. Bereishit isn't just "in the beginning" relating to the time. In it hides the Hebrew word "rosh" – "head" – a symbol of leadership, order, and power. In Haazinu, Moses asks heaven and earth to hear him (Deut. 32:1), and later, to bear witnesses to his speech. In the beginning of Bereishit, freshly created heaven and earth witness God using Divine speech to create light (Bereishit 1:3). Both describe, but also create, realities. Through our actions and words, we can choose our destiny.

There is a symbolic and deep relationship between Haazinu and Bereishit. Haazinu is read when we are preparing for the ceremonies of Yom Kippur and the book of life is open in front of us. The liturgy reminds us about our mortality. It is a time for introspection, when we ponder our own individual sins and communal shortcomings, and we ask God for forgiveness. At this very sensitive time, we read chapters of Torah that are dedicated to preparations to be made before the death of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Of all the things he could do on the cusp of death, Moshe teaches the Jewish people a song, which is also a prophecy, written in beautiful, but rather cryptic, metaphorical language. Its topic is challenging. Moshe offers a message for future generations, one that seems to echo throughout our history, becoming our national destiny. We will become powerful, he says. We will abuse our privilege. Therefore, we will fail, and lose our divine protection, rendering us vulnerable. We will become easy targets, and those around us will turn against us. Then God will gather us and protect those remaining alive, and the Jewish world will be rebuilt until yet another failure. Some of us will survive to rebuild the Jewish community; we will become stronger again, and so on and so forth. The pattern will repeat itself. As a Polish Jew, I recognize this well.

Parshat Bereishit opens the entire Torah. It is the beginning of the year, as we look toward the future. In it, God creates all known reality. The book will describe everything that has happened from the first day...until the last chapters, which we are reading now.



Perhaps the Torah's timeline isn't circular or linear. Haazinu and V'Zot HaBracha, with their prophetic visions of the future, create a spiral. We come back to this place, year after year, but not this same layer, as each year gives us another "now," another time to change our destiny. We can shape the course of history to make it crooked by our sins and misdeeds, or we can straighten it out, pushing our historical timelines toward the final redemption.

According to the Sfat Emet, the true relationship between Haazinu and Bereishit is hidden in the destiny of the Jewish people, as partners in creation and *tikkun*, fixing the world. In a potentially daunting, depressing vision in our *parsha*, the Gerer Rebbe sees hope. The job of the Jewish people, rooted as we are in a spiritual dimension, is to bring the Creator down into material reality. It is hinted in the text that this is done by studying Torah and fulfilling commandments, but that is left hanging a bit between the lines. The focus is the partnership in creation of the world as Parshat Bereishit was indeed after Haazinu, as if the last chapters of Torah set a scene for its beginning.

ובענין שירת האזינו כבר כתבתי במ"א שהוא תיקון כלל הבריאה ע"י בני" שהם נבראו לחבר כל אשר בארץ בשורשו בשמים. כמ"ש ואשים דברי בפיך כו' בחי' תורה שבע"פ והנהגה של הבריאה. ובצל ידי כסיתך הוא השורש נשמת בני ישראל בשמים. וע"ז נאמר יסובבנהו יבוננהו כו'. לנטוע שמים וליסוד ארץ שעי"ז יש כח בבני" לתקן בריאת שמים וארץ. וכמ"ש חז"ל עמי אתה בשותפות כו'. עפ"י ענין הנ"ל אורייתא וקוב"ה וישראל הכל אחד. ויש בלבנות בני" רשימות מכוונים לאותיות התורה. וכענין רמ"ח איברים וגידים שהם רמזים למ"ע ול"ת שבתורה. וכ' שימו לבבכם כו' ושם כתיב ושמתם את דברי כו' על לבבכם כי יש להם התחברות כנ"ל.

...The subject of the song Haazinu, as I already wrote, what those things are about, that it is. Tikkun – the restoration of the fundamental principle of the Creation by Sons of Israel, because they were created to connect everything that is in the physical world with its heavenly roots. As it is written Isaiah 51:16 “Have put My words in your mouth,” which is the aspect of the Oral Torah, with the natural way in which creation acts. “And Shelter you in my Hand.” This is the root of the soul of the Sons of Israel in the Heavens. On that has been said “He engorged him, watched over him.” And this is why it is written that: “I, who planted the skies and made firm the earth,” because there is power in the hand of the sons of Israel to repair the creation of heaven and the earth. As our rabbis teach, “You are in partnership with me,” that the Jewish people, Torah, and God are one. And that there are in the hearts of sons of Israel lists dedicated to Hebrew letters, and there is a relationship between the number of negative and positive commandments and that relates to the number of organs and tenders.



Because of that it is written there (Shema) and “you should put on your heart my words” because hearts of Israel are intertwined (with the Divine). (Sfat Emes, Deuteronomy, Haazinu 4:3)

The Sfat Emet sees in Haazinu a deep connection between God, Torah, the Jewish people, and the world, and suggests that the Jewish people have a unique role to play in the history of humanity. According to Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, we already have all that it takes to bring about the final redemption. Armed with heavenly connections, with Torah and *mitzvot*, we are able to live up to the Divine expectation.

I would like to wish all of us at this time that this year brings the fulfillment of the prophetic vision of the Gerer Rebbe; that the Jewish people fix themselves and the world around them. When we look back on this fine layer of time, may we see how this coming year will leave the world in a better state than when we greeted it.

Ketivah V'Chatimah Tova.



Rabbanit Miriam Gonczarska grew up in Poland and lived in Warsaw prior to beginning her studies at Maharat. She became involved in the revival of Jewish life in Poland beginning in the early 1990s. Miriam pursued her studies in Israel at Nishmat, Matan, and Pardes. She has worked at the Lauder Foundation, Europe Magazine, Aish Hatorah Women's College in Belarus, and the Hebrew Section of Polish Radio as journalist. She now works for the Jewish Community of Warsaw as a Jewish educator. She has been delegated by her community to study at Rabbanit. Miriam serves as a member of the Council of the Union of the Jewish Community of Poland and of the Religious Board of the Union. In addition, she is a member of the board of the Council of Christian and Jews and Bnei Brith. Miriam is actively involved in the recently founded Second Generation Association in Poland. Miriam has written articles that have appeared in numerous publications.