

Parshat Haazinu
On the Wings of God
Talia Weisberg - Class of 2024

HaAzinu, the penultimate parsha of the Torah, is quite sharp in its rebuke of Bnei Yisrael's misdeeds and description of the curses that will befall them should they not cease their wrongdoing. Moshe, who is told at the end of the parsha that his death is imminent, uses his short amount of remaining time to leave a lasting impression on the people he has shepherded for so many years. Among all of these difficult reprimands and punishments, Moshe also includes what can only be interpreted as a beautiful image of God's love for Bnei Yisrael:

For the LORD's portion is His people, Jacob His own allotment. He found him in a desert region, In an empty howling waste. He engirded him, watched over him, Guarded him as the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings, Gliding down to his young, So did He spread His wings and take him, Bear him along on His pinions. (Deut. 32:9-11)

כִּי חֶלֶק יְקוּק עִמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל
 נִחַלְתּוֹ: יִמְצְאֵהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְבָּר
 וּבְתֵהוּ יִלֵּל יִשְׁמֹן יִסְבְּבֵנְהוּ יְבוֹנְנֵהוּ
 יִצְרְנֵהוּ כְּאִישׁוֹן עֵינָיו: כְּנֹשֶׁר יַעִיר
 קִיּוֹ עַל-גִּזְלָיו יִרְחֹף יִפְרֵשׂ כְּנָפָיו
 יִקְחֵהוּ יִשְׂאֵהוּ עַל-אַבְרָתּוֹ: (דְּבָרִים
 לִגְט־יא)

The metaphor of God as an eagle, protecting Bnei Yisrael by bearing them on His wings, appears earlier in Tanach as well. In Parshat Yitro, when the Israelites arrive at Har Sinai, Hashem tells Moshe:

Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me." (Ex. 19:3-4)

...כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבְנֵי
 יִשְׂרָאֵל: אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי
 לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל-כְּנָפֵי נְשָׁרִים
 וְאָבֵא אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי: (שְׁמוֹת יט:ג-ד)

This imagery is also found in Tehillim:

He will cover you with His pinions; you will find refuge under His wings; His fidelity is an encircling shield. You need not fear the terror by night, or the arrow that flies by day, the plague that stalks in the darkness, or the scourge that ravages at noon. A thousand may fall at your left side, ten thousand at your right, but it shall not reach you. (Ps. 91:4-7)

בְּאַבְרָתּוֹ | יִסֹּף לָךְ וְתַחַת-כְּנָפָיו
 תִּחְסֶה צִנְה וְסִחַרְהָ אֲמַתּוֹ: לֹא-תִירָא
 מִפֶּחַד לַיְלִה מִחֹץ יַעֲוִף יוֹמָם: מִדְבָּר
 בְּאֶפֶס יֵהְלֶךְ מִלְקָטָב יִשׁוּד צְהָרִים:
 יִפֹּל מִצְדָּךְ | אֶלֶף וּרְבֵבָה מִיְמִינֶךָ
 אֶלֶיךָ לֹא יָגֹשׁ: (תְּהִלִּים צא:ד-ז)

At first glance, it may seem odd to compare Hashem to an eagle, a bird of prey which is not kosher. As alluded to in the pasuk from Tehillim, Rashi explains in his commentary on both Yitro and HaAzinu that the eagle flies higher than all other birds, so it is immune from attack from its fellow avians and only concerned about arrows shot by humans. Thus, the eagle flies with its babies on its back rather than holding them in its claws, so as to ensure its offspring is protected from the danger below. Rashi cites the pillar of fire that God sent to stop the Egyptians from overtaking Bnei Yisrael at the Yam Suf as an example of this eagle-like form of protection that Hashem affords us.

This is a particularly powerful image of God's love, given the time of year. Yom Kippur was just yesterday, when we spent hours in shul and in private meditation considering our

11 Tishrei 5782 | September 17, 2021

personal and communal misdeeds from 5781 and beseeching Hashem for forgiveness and the opportunity to do better in 5782. God is not a faceless overlord who judges us with indifference; He is a loving Parent who shows us mercy and compassion, keeping us out of harm's way. No matter what sins we might commit, we will always be His children and He will bear us on His wings.

Sukkot begins in just three days from now, when we will begin to dwell in sukkahs in the exposed outdoors. The sukkah is a temporary structure that clearly does not afford us much actual protection. The Shulchan Aruch and Mishna Berura (OC 631:3) rule that the ideal s'chach subjects the sukkah user to the elements, such that they can see the stars and feel the rain. This is a reminder that we are the eagle nestlings on God's wings, lest we forget Who is really protecting us at any given time.

Certainly, this does not mean that we should forfeit doing our *hishtadlut* (personal effort). It is noteworthy that the perek of Tehillim that invokes the eagle imagery of God's love and unconditional protection also mentions a plague that strikes down thousands. As we go through our second Tishrei with COVID in our midst, we must still wear masks, engage in appropriate social distancing, get vaccinated when eligible, and otherwise adhere to public health guidelines to ensure that we are partnering with Hashem in our personal protection.

Once we have done our *hishtadlut*, we can only place our trust in our Hashem, our Creator, who flies with us on His back, showing us His unconditional love.



Talia Weisberg is originally from New York, NY. She previously served as the Director of Academic Affairs at the Consulate General of Israel to New England, where she designed and executed strategic initiatives to promote understanding and knowledge of Israel among university students, faculty, and administrations. She earned her Bachelor of Arts at Harvard University in the Comparative Study of Religion with a secondary field in Women, Gender, and Sexuality. Her senior honors thesis explored the Bais Yaakov girls' school movement, of which she is an alumna, and its role in the evolution of Orthodox women's formal religious education. As an undergraduate, Talia held several leadership roles within Harvard Hillel and campus feminist groups. She currently serves as the Ritual Chair on the board of the Orthodox Minyan at Harvard Hillel, a minyan that caters to students, young professionals, and young families in Cambridge, MA. In 2013, she was named as one of the Jewish Week's "36 Under 36" young visionaries reshaping and broadening the Jewish community.