

Parshat Haazinu
Lifelong Learning
Rabba Dr. Anat Sharbat - Class of 2015

Every Yom Kippur I finish the day on a high. Standing in front of the open Aron Kodesh during the Ne'ilah with the gates of heaven open, almost disconnected from my body and with a lot of neshama/soul singing cathartically:

מוחל עוונות, מוחל עוונות עמו, מעביר ראשון ראשון. לא כרעתם תגמול, לא כרעתם תגמול.

And then the flow of life washes away all the feelings, promises, and the process I experienced during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva. I don't quite succeed in preserving that same lofty feeling and with it, the list of things that I would like to improve during the coming year.

How can we preserve that feeling of promise that we felt at the end of Yom Kippur? How can we continue making progress towards our best self?

We can learn much from the final words of that leader of leaders – Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe, from the height of his 120 years, just before going to his death, commands us the Torah of life. This living will that Moshe leaves us before his death contains much guidance as to how we should live our lives and be our 'best selves', continue listening to ourselves and be in touch with our mission of teshuvah, not just during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva, but all year round.

My suggestion is that האזינו is specifically read now to help us figure out how to make change permanent. What are the lessons of האזינו?

1. Hear our internal voice through introspection and dreaming.
2. Express gratitude.
3. Utilize poetry and emotion
4. Achieve overall balance

Now I'll share those points in detail.

In order to successfully maintain the change, we must be in constant listening mode.

"הָאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֲדַבְרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי-יְיָ" // *Give ear, O heavens, let me speak; Let the earth hear the words I utter!*

האזינו – means to listen, to pay attention.

Moshe says this explicitly: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם שִׁמּוּ לְבַבְכֶם לְכֹל-הַדְּבָר // *he said to them: Take to heart all the words with which I have warned you*

Listening to who we truly want to be, not to who we have started out as and will therefore continue to be, not to who others would like us to be, but rather – to who we want to be, in every area: in our attributes, professionally, with our family, with others. In every possible field. We need to listen carefully and hear our internal voice. We need to listen in order to hear.

How do we listen and hear? How do we pay attention?

The song of Ha'azinu contains a historical survey - a look back at what has happened.

And it also contains a prophesy of redemption – a look into the future. How we would like to see the future.

The clear, detailed look – both backward and forward – enables us to have introspection, and to dream.

Introspection – the look inwards – is part of listening, getting to know myself.

Dreaming is the future. How I see myself in the future. Whom I would like to be.

Getting to know myself sometimes teaches me about my limitations and can lead to obstruction and therefore the dream – the look at the horizon – is aimed at breaking down this barrier. Of course, I have limitations, but if I have a clear dream, I will aspire to fulfill it. The more detailed my dream is, the clearer the picture - the things I need to work at, to improve or to learn – in order to fulfill my dream.

Shirat Ha'azinu also includes words of reproof and castigation. Moshe's criticism is that the Children of Israel failed to show gratitude for what they had and what they were given.

וַיִּבְעֹט וַיִּשְׂרֹן וַיִּבְעֹט // *So Jeshurun grew fat and kicked.*

They always looked for the things they did not have. Gratitude allows us to achieve other good things. Gratitude allows us to recognize the things we have, and a positive outlook directs us to seeing more positive things. Gratitude also enables us to be aware and to choose. Most of us react on autopilot most of the time. Gratitude enables a consciousness of choice, positive choice and focuses us on the present. What is good now.

Last year I bought each member of my family a gift for Rosh Hashanah – a nice journal in which to write the things we are thankful for and I suggested to my daughters and to Ariel to 'journal' the good things in their lives every night before going to sleep. The highest level of gratitude is the ability to find the positive things in the challenges we encounter throughout life. As the famous performance coach Brendon Buchard put it:

“When we learn to see struggle as necessary, important and a positive part of our journey, then we can find true peace and personal power.” Gratitude is actually a gift of introspection.

Moshe chose to express his last words before death, his testament, in the form of a poem. Why? Because poetry appeals to emotion. Moshe wanted to leave an impression in the hearts of Bnei Yisrael before his death and chose to do so in poetry. A testament of poetry.

Poetry, unlike prose, is targeted our emotions, less our intellect. This decision to speak to our emotions is important. As we know, emotions guide our choices. They move us to action.

But emotions could be both positive or negative ones, and if we take action based on our emotions, we want to make sure we choose the positive ones.

Ha'azinu appeals to the ear – to our balance spot of the body. It can be heard strongly by the word itself in Hebrew - האזינו, אוזן, איזון. Balancing emotions, balancing heaven and earth, balancing the physical and the spiritual. By balancing we are able to choose the emotion we want to create for our action. The calendar directs us in this case to Sukkot, which is approaching, and the emotion we are commanded to have is one of happiness. After all Sukkot is THE holiday on which we are commanded to be happy, ושמחת בחגך. So it seems to me that our parsha in combination with the time of the year suggests that happiness also enables us to be balanced and in line with the poem.

And this, in essence, is the whole Torah:

Shirat Ha'azinu is compared to the entire Torah because of its 613 letters, equivalent to the 613 mitzvot. In last week's parsha we read:

וְעַתָּה כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמָּדָה אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמָּה בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה־לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבִנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
"*Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be My witness against the people of Israel*". The Gemarah in Masechet Sanhedrin explains that the pasuk means that every person should write their own Sefer Torah. The poem is compared here to the entire Torah.

Finally – there is a tradition in Chabad that was passed down by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson in Sefer Zikhronot: "One of the Maharal's customs was to say Shirat Ha'azinu each day before the tefilla. He regarded it as a way to attaining pureness of the mind and heart..."

This is not just any poem, this is the base that should be recited before starting the day, every day, in order to continue growing. This is the morning routine we need to have in order to have our minds and our hearts prepare properly for the new beginning every day. We want to start our morning with clear vision through our introspection and to be in a gratitude mode, to be at our best self.

May this year be one in which we truly succeed in purifying our minds and hearts and remember to continue our personal growth on the way to our best self, all out of happiness.



Rabba Dr. Anat Sharbat served as part of the *clergy team at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale*. Rabba Dr. Sharbat graduated from Bar-Ilan University with an M.A. cum laude and a Ph.D. in Talmud. She was born and raised in Israel and is the first Israeli Orthodox Rabba to serve in the United States. Rabba Dr. Anat has returned to Israel with her family this summer.