

Stollen Moments – Ha'azinu – October 8, 2022

PARASHA SUMMARY FROM WWW. REFORMJUDAISM.ORG

- Moses sings his last song, a love poem to God and a chastisement of the people, who are not worthy of Adonai. (32:1–6)
- The poem recounts the blessings that God has bestowed on the Israelites, the wicked deeds they have committed, and the punishments that God then inflicted upon them. (32:7–43)
- God tells Moses to begin his ascent of Mount Nebo, from where he will see the Land of Israel from a distance but will not be allowed to enter it. (32:45–52)

Deuteronomy 32

- 1 Give ear, O heavens, let me speak;
Let the earth hear the words I utter!
- 2 May my discourse come down as the rain,
My speech distill as the dew,
Like showers on young growth,
Like droplets on the grass.
- 3 For the name of the Lord I proclaim;
Give glory to our God!
- 4 The Rock! — His deeds are perfect,
Yea, all His ways are just;
A faithful God, never false,
True and upright is He.
- 5 Children unworthy of Him —
That crooked, perverse generation —
Their baseness has played Him false.
- 6 Do you thus requite the Lord,
O dull and witless people?
Is not He the Father who created you,
Fashioned you and made you endure!
- 7 Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of ages past;
Ask your father, he will inform you,
Your elders, they will tell you:
- 8 When the Most High gave nations their homes
And set the divisions of man,

הֲאֵינִי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאֲדָמָה
וְעֵרְפָה כְמוֹתָר לִקְוֹי
כְּשִׁלְיָרִים עָלַי דְּשֵׂא
כִּי שֵׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא
הַצֹּרֵר תַּמִּים פְּלִלְכֵי
אֵל אֲמוֹנָה וְאֵיךְ עֵל
שִׁדְדָה לֹו לֹא בְנִי וּמוֹמֵם
הָ לִי יְהוָה תִּזְמְלוּ אֶת
הַלֹּא הוּא אֲבִיךָ קִיךָ
זָכַר יְבוֹדֵי עֹלָם
שֵׂאֵל אֲבִיךָ וַיִּגְדֵךְ
בְּהַנְחִיל לְעֵלְיֹךְ גּוֹיִם
יִלְבַּב וְנִבְלָת עַמִּים
כִּי חֵלֶכְךָ יְהוָה לְמוֹ
יִמְצָאֶהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְבָר
יִסְבְּבֶנְהוּ יְבוֹנְדֶהוּ
כְּנִשְׂרָ יַעֲרֵ— קִנּוּ
יַפְרֵשׁ כְּנַפְיֹו יִקְוֶהוּ
יְהוָה בְּדַד יִזְוֶנוּ
יִרְכְּבוּ עַל בְּמוֹת אֶרֶץ
וַיִּנְקֶהוּ רֶבֶשׁ מוֹסַלַע
זִמְמָתֵךְ בְּקֶר וּזְלַבְצָן
וְאֵלִים בְּנֵי בִשָּׁן וְעִתּוּדִים
זָדִים עֲלֵב תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶהוּ
עֲלֵמַת עֲבִית כְּשִׂית
וַיִּנְבַּל צֹר יַעֲרֵתוּ
בְּתוֹלְעֵבֶת יִבְעִיסֶהוּ
אֱלֹהִים לֹא יִדְעוּם
לֹא שִׁלְיָרִים אֲבִיתֵכֶם
וְתִשְׁכַּח אֵל מוֹחֲלֵךְ
מוֹכֵס בְּנֵי וּבְנֵדֵי
אֲרָאָה מִה אֲחֻרִיתֵם
בְּנִים לֹא אֲמוֹן בָּם
כְּעִסְוֵי בְּהִבְלִיָּהֶם
בְּהֵי נִבְלָ אֲנִיעִיסֶם

וְהִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אֲמִרְיֹו
תֹּזֵל כְּטַל אֲמַרְתִּי
וּכְרִיבִים עָלַי עֵשֶׂב
הִבּוּ גִדְלֵי לֶאֱדֵינִי
כִּי כָּל דְּרָבִיּוּ מוֹשִׁפֵּט
צִדִּיק וַיִּשְׁרֵר הוּא
דֹר עֲקֵשׁ וּפְתַלְתַּל
עִם נִבְלָ וְכֹא חֲכָם
— הוּא עֲשֵׂךְ וַיִּכְנֹךְ
בְּנֵי שָׁנֹת דָּר וּדָר
זִקְנִיךָ וַיִּאֲמָרוּ לָךְ
בְּהַפְרִידוּ בְנֵי אֲרָם
לְמוֹסַפֵּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
יִעֲקֹב זָוֵבֵל מִזְכֹּרְתוֹ
וּבִתְהוּ יִלְל יִשְׁבּוֹךְ
יִצְרֶנְהוּ כְּאִישׁוֹן עֵינֹו
עַל גּוֹזְכֵיּוֹ יִרְזֹף
יִשְׂאֶהוּ עַל אֲבִירָתוֹ
וְאֵיךְ עֲמוּ אֵל זָכַר
וַיִּאֲכַל תְּנוּבַת שִׂדִי
וְשִׁמָּן מוֹחֲלֵי שִׁיר
עִם חֲלָב כֹּרִים
עִם זֹלָב כְּכִיּוֹת חֲטָה
וַיִּשְׂמָן יִשְׂרוּן וַיִּבְעֵט
וַיִּשֶׂשׁ אֱלֹהֵי עֲשִׂיהוּ
יִקְנָאֶהוּ בְּזֵרִים
יִבּוֹזוּ לְשִׁדִּים לֹא אֱלֹהֵי
זֹדֵשִׁים מִקֶּרֶב בָּאוּ
צֹר יִלְדֵךְ תִּשִׁי
וַיִּרָא יְהוָה וַיִּנְאֹךְ
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶסְתִּירָה פְּנֵי מוֹה
כִּי דֹר תִּהְפַּכֶת הַמָּה
הֵם קִנְאוּנִי בְלֹא אֵל
וְאֵנִי אֶקְנִיאֵם בְּלֹאֵם
כִּי אִשִּׁי קִדְדָה בְּאֶפְיִ

He fixed the boundaries of peoples
In relation to Israel's numbers.
9 For the Lord's portion is His people,
Jacob His own allotment.
10 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.
11 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;
12 The Lord alone did guide him,
No alien god at His side.

...

45 And when Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, 46 he said to them: Take to heart all the words with which I have warned you this day. Enjoin them upon your children, that they may observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching. 47 For this is not a trifling thing for you: it is your very life; through it you shall long endure on the land that you are to possess upon crossing the Jordan.

48 That very day the Lord spoke to Moses: 49 Ascend these heights of Abarim to Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab facing Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving the Israelites as their holding. 50 You shall die on the mountain that you are about to ascend, and shall be gathered to your kin, as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his kin; 51 for you both broke faith with Me among the Israelite people, at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to uphold My sanctity among the Israelite people. 52 You may view the land from a distance, but you shall not enter it — the land that I am giving to the Israelite people.

Rashi on 32:1

הַשָּׁמַיִם הַאֲזִינוּ הַאֲזִינוּ HEAR YE HEAVENS that I warn Israel, and be ye witnesses to this matter; for so I have told them that ye will be witnesses (cf. Rashi on Deuteronomy 31:28). Similar is the meaning of וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ (i.e. the verb has the force of an imperative: AND LET THE EARTH HEAR). And why did He call heaven and earth as witnesses against them? Moses thought: "I am a being of flesh and blood (mortal); tomorrow I shall be dead. If the Israelites will once say, 'We have never accepted the covenant', who can come and refute them?" Therefore he called heaven and earth as witnesses against them — witnesses that endure forever (Sifrei Devarim 306:15). And a further reason was that if they should act worthily, the witnesses might come and give them their reward: the vine might yield its fruit, the ground give its increase, the heaven bestow its dew; while if they should act sinfully, the hand of the witnesses might first be against them (Rashi uses a phrase similar to that used of human witnesses; cf. e.g. Deuteronomy 13:10): "and He will restrain the heaven, that there be no rain, and the earth will not give its increase; and you shall perish quickly" (Deuteronomy 11:17) — through the attacks of other nations (Tanchuma 5:10:1).

Sforno on Deuteronomy 32:7

(7) זכור ימות עולם, After concluding the introductory section of his poem, during the course of which he announced that it was his purpose to proclaim the perfect righteousness of the Lord G'd, Who has proven a loyal G'd showering goodness upon the people of Israel, and Who would not reverse a blessing once bestowed, Moses begins to discuss Israel's past and future.

First, Moses reminds the people that G'd had originally hoped to bestow a brilliant future for all of mankind, i.e. ימות עולם, He had hoped that history would develop in that direction. When this failed to happen, שנות דור ודור, during the years of one generation after another, G'd decided on His pilot project the Jewish people and He raised them to an elevated position among the nations. This is basically what He will do at the end of "history," [history is perceived as a period of education for the people filling or making a brief appearance on the stage of history. Ed.]

Second, G'd had provided the people with optimum conditions to serve Him joyfully while they enjoyed all the material advantages that life on earth has to offer. He gave them a beautiful country, one flowing with milk and honey, to do this in. Instead, they rebelled and repaid good with evil. There can be no question that the people responsible for frustrating G'd's master plan deserve to be severely punished for this.

Third, due to the serious nature of their sin they deserve to be wiped out completely. If it were not for the desecration of the Lord's name that would be a by-product of the destruction of His chosen people, nothing would have prevented G'd from administering this punishment.

Fourth, Moses reveals the reason why the redemption of the Jewish people will occur at the end of what we call "history," באחרית הימים.

Fifth, Moses elaborates somewhat on the nature of this redemption and the retribution G'd will wreak at that time on the other nations of the world. The nations will primarily be punished for what they did to the Jewish people throughout history. These then are the five sections into which the portion of Haazinu is divided, our sages having given us an easy way of reminding ourselves of this division by calling the portion הזיו"ל"ך. (Rosh Hashanah 31) Moses therefore commences with the words: זכור ימות עולם, "study history and thereby learn to recognise how much G'd had endeavoured to shower good upon you, starting already with first man whom He transferred to Gan Eden, the most exclusive environment on earth.

Rashi on 32:11

על גוזליו ירחף IT HOVERETH OVER ITS YOUNG — it does not press heavily upon them, but hovers above them — touching them and yet not touching them. So too, the Holy One, blessed be He, (Job. 37:23) "The Almighty, we did not find Him to be too powerful in strength": when He came to give the Torah to Israel, He did not reveal Himself from one side, (thus concentrating His power at one point), but from four sides, as it is said, (Deuteronomy 33:2) "The Lord came from Sinai, and shone forth from Seir unto them; He appeared from Mount Paran"; also (Habakkuk 3:3) "God came from Teman" — this is the fourth side (Sifrei Devarim 314:1).

Ephraim Helfgot on 32:11

Rabbi Menachem Liebttag pointed out that birds of prey, like an eagle, learn to fly by sink or swim. This means that mother eagles drop their young, and the little ones learn to fly by necessity.

Rabbi Liebttag re-interpreted the above verse, and particularly the words Yifrosh K'nafav. According to his idea, this actually refers to the baby eagle, spreading his wings and needing to be taken by the parent if he falls. This is a metaphor for Am Yisrael, who try to follow mitzvot but sometimes fall. They need Hashem to help them, to lift them on his wings. This is especially appropriate in the lead-up to Rosh Hashanah.

Rashi on Deuteronomy 32:51:2

(51) על אשר לא קדשתם אותי BECAUSE YE SANCTIFIED ME NOT — i.e. because you brought it about that I was not sanctified; I said to you, 'Speak to the rock!' They, however, smote it and had therefore to smite it twice. Had they, however, spoken to it, and it had given forth its water without being smitten, the Name of the Heaven would have been sanctified; for the Israelites would have said, "How is it with the rock which is subject neither to reward nor to punishment, for when it acts meritoriously it receives no reward and when it sins it is not punished? It fulfils so obediently the command of its Creator! — how much the more should we do so!"