
DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

PARSHAS HA'AZINU

The Song of Ha'azinu

The Parshas of Ha'azinu is undoubtedly one of the lesser learned, and hence lesser understood, parshiyos of the Torah. The fact that it is written as a *shira* (song or poem), coupled with the fact that it is normally read around the time of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with their own dominant themes, results in the effect of hearing it read being often more atmospheric than educational. In truth, of course, every verse of this song needs to be unraveled and understood.

The general sweep of Haazinu is provided by the Ramban in verse 40, for indeed, it encompasses our entire history, from its early inception until the ultimate future redemption. It contains both great intensity and harsh extremes. On the one hand, some of the calamitous verses are, in their own way, more devastating than any mentioned in the Torah so far, including the tochachah. However, at the same time, the unwavering vision of the ultimate endurance of the Jewish people and fulfillment of their historic role is likewise emphatically set forth. Indeed, perhaps the full measure and intensity of these themes, which are at once castigating and elevating, devastating and comforting, could only really be captured in a song.

A major theme of Haazinu that the Ramban points out, as expressed in verses 26-27, is the twinning of two concepts: 1) Hashem's name and 2) the Jewish people.

Hashem's Name: Many times throughout the Chumash and Tanach, Hashem says He will act "for the sake of His name." The meaning behind this is that Hashem created the world so that people could enjoy His goodness and attain an elevated level of existence. This involves awareness of Hashem's name, i.e. of Him as Creator, as well as the values that He embodies and that He expects of people. Should this awareness fade from people's consciousness, the goal of creation could not be realized and creation itself would be in vain.¹

The Jewish People: Part of choosing the People of Israel as His people is that they become intimately bound up with awareness of Him and His message. As such the destinies of the Jewish People and Hashem's name are now intertwined. If they thrive and succeed, Hashem's name becomes recognized and valued. If they should suffer and dwindle, Hashem's name likewise becomes subject to lack of recognition. Moreover, this relationship is also expressed in the fact that the antagonism of many peoples toward Israel is on account of the very notion that they bear Hashem's name and His message. Since their actions against the Jewish people are ultimately against Hashem Himself, they thereby render themselves fully

¹ Ramban to verse 26.

deserving of His retribution, and forfeit any claim of immunity on the basis of their being instruments of Divine wrath.

The enduring message of Parshas Haazinu, therefore, is that the Jewish people represent Hashem's name and message not only through the things that they *say* and *do*, but also by the things they *experience*. In choosing them as His nation, Hashem entrusted them not only as His *Divine subjects* with the performance of the commandments of the Torah, but also as a *Divine object* through which His role as Creator and Controller of the world could be manifest.

Indeed, looked at in this way, the theme of Haazinu and that of the Days of Awe are not so disparate after all. Numerous times over the period of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we base our petitions both for success and for forgiveness on Hashem "acting for the His name":

- ▷ Already beginning with the recitation of selichos, we invoke this idea by saying, "בנו נקרא עשה למען שמך – שמוך, ה' עשה למען שמך – Your name is called upon us, Hashem, act for the sake of Your name."
- ▷ Likewise, in the Avinu Malkeinu prayer, we say, "עשה למען שמך הגדול הגבור והנורא שנקרא עלינו – act for the sake of Your great, mighty and awesome name that is called upon us."

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur themselves, this idea is highlighted in the Amidah prayer:

- ▷ The third blessing begins with the plea: "ובכן תן פחדך על כל מעשיך – and so, too, place Your awe upon all of Your handiwork," and then moves on to ask, "ובכן תן כבוד לעמך – And so, too, give honor to Your people."
- ▷ Interestingly, the next blessing echoes the connection between these two themes in reverse. It begins by proclaiming, "אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים... ושמוך הגדול והקדוש עלינו קראת – You chose us from among all the nations... and Your great and holy name You called upon us," and then concludes by beseeching Hashem, "מלוך על כל העולם כולו בכבודך... וידע כל פעול כי אתה פעלתו – reign over the entire world in Your glory... let each creation know that You created it."

This dual "backwards and forwards sweep" underscores the intimate connection between the ideas of Israel as Hashem's nation and the nations of the world's recognition of Him as its Creator and Guide.

And thus, the the Yamim Noraim form the seasonal backdrop for the song of Haazinu, whose culmination and realization we longingly await:

הַרְנִינּוּ גוֹיִם עִמּוֹ כִּי דָם עֲבָדָיו יִקּוּם וְנִקְם יִשִּׁיב לְצַרְיָו וְכַפֵּר אֶדְמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ

O nations, sing the praises of His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants; He will bring retribution upon His foes, and He will appease His land and His people.

May we merit to see it, speedily in our days!