

# Torah Talk with the Rabbi

As we approach the end of the Book of Deuteronomy and Moses's last discourses, this week's Torah portion, *Ha'azinu*, presents Moshe's poetry, Moshe's song. The *parsha* opens with very bucolic language.

'Give ear, o heavens, let me speak; let the earth the words I utter! May my discourse come down as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like showers on young growth, like droplets on the grass.' (Deuteronomy 32:1-2)

An early *Midrash* warns about the language of Torah. Comparing it to rain, the *Midrash* tells us that as much as Torah is good, often it becomes clear that Torah is not good for everyone all the time.

In the words of the Midrash, "just as rain is life for the world, so words of Torah. But then why not say: Just as with rain, part of the world is happy and part, sad. For example, one whose pit and vat is full of wine, and his vat and threshing floor is exposed to the rain, is grieved by it, so words of Torah!"

In this comparison the *Midrash* cannot compromise the words of Torah and adds, "My words shall flow as the dew"- Just as with the dew, all the world is happy with it, so, words of Torah."

After a few introductory verses, we encounter a description of God's kindness to the Jewish people:

"God found them in a desert land, and in a desolate, howling wasteland. God encompassed them and bestowed understanding upon them; God protected them as the pupil of God's eye. As an eagle awakens its nest, hovering over its fledglings, it spreads its wings, taking them and carrying them on its pinions." (Deuteronomy 32:10-11)

The song then continues with the prediction that the Children of Israel will eventually turn away from God and describes all the bad things that will happen to the Jewish people to finally close on a positive note.

This Biblical poem and portions of this song, were sung by the priests during the Musaf offering when there was a Temple in Jerusalem.

And the question might be asked is, why this song, with sections which are so negative?

The answer is, in the weeks that the Levites sang the bitter parts of the song, they were teaching the people how to overcome tragedy. Tragedy which is, invariably, part of our lives. The Levites were teaching us to be patient and wait for the song to unfold.

When everything is going well it is difficult to feel complete joy. Part of us is always worried that the blessings in our life will not last. We can't be fully happy with our successes, because deep down we fear that we may lose them. We can't fully celebrate our relationships, because, deep down, we are worried that they might come to an end.

This Torah portion, *Haazinu*, is always read around the High Holy Days, in the month that contains both the Days of Awe, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and days of joy, Sukkot and Simchat Torah.

In the beginning of the month, we face the pain created by uncertainty. We think about the mistakes of the past year, we think about the pain that these mistakes might have caused to others and, in the process, the pain that comes from separation from Adonai, our God.

As part of the process towards the Days of Awe, we overcome the pain, we return, we reconnect. And then we realize that our relationship with God is still intact.

We discover that the intense joy of Sukkot and Simchat Torah is possible only after we experience the trepidation of the Days of Awe. We discover that all parts of the journey are integral to the intense joy. We discover that they are all part of the same song.

No matter where life brings us, we remember that we are immersed in a song. And what is what we need to do? *Haazinu*, to listen and to happily join the song!

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Sukkot Sameah!

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