



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Devarim

Parshat Ha'Azinu

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The Song That Connects

By Ari Raskas

I grew up in a household where our parents very much wanted us to do well in school and succeed. Still, they were realistic and knew that each child is distinctive and that there were subject matters that one sibling would excel in that others would not. But, above all, they were always focused on each of our "emotional" rather than our "intellectual" IQs. Without the former, you can be the smartest person in the room and go to the best schools in the country but never really get anywhere in life. Emotional intelligence is critical for making friendships, a happy marriage, meaningful relationships in the workplace, and so much more.

So where am I going with this, you might ask?

This week's *parsha*, *Ha'Azinu*, begins with these words:

הָאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶדְבָּרָה / וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי־כִי:

יִעֲרַף כַּמָּטָר לִקְהוֹי / תִּגְזַל כַּטַּל אִמְרֵתִי כַּשֶּׁעִירָם עַל־יְדוּשָׁא / וְכַרְבִּיבִים עַל־יַעֲשׂוּב:

Give ear, O heavens, let me speak / Let the earth hear 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. (Devarim. 32:1-2)

In *Ha'Azinu*, *Moshe* does the unexpected — he teaches *Bnei Yisrael* a song. After teaching Torah, guiding *Bnei Yisrael* out of *Mitzrayim* and through the desert, we see one of the most outstanding leaders of all time teaching a song. *Moshe* knew that unless he did so, all that he taught might enter their minds but not their hearts — he knew that song was needed to make the experience and the learning part of their emotional IQ. Feelings — emotional intelligence — move us to act and give us the energy to excel and the drive to succeed in our daily lives and spiritual lives.

One of the greatest scholars of our generation, Rav Soloveitchik, knew the importance of emotional IQ. In one of his speeches, A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne (Spring 1978), the Rav said, "People are mistaken when they think there is only one *mesorah*, one Jewish tradition handed on through the generations." "In fact," he said, "there are two: one handed down by fathers, the other by mothers." He quoted the famous verse from *Mishlei* 1:8,

שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוֹסֵר אָבִיךָ וְאַל־תִּטְּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ: *Listen, my son, to the instruction of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother.*

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From a father, he said, we learn how to read a text, comprehend, analyze, infer and apply. We also learn how to act: what to do and what not to do. The father-tradition is "an intellectual-moral one." Turning to "the teaching of your mother," the Rav became personal, speaking of what he learned from his mother. "From her," he said: "I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent, and warmth to *mitzvot*. I learned from her the most important thing in life — to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive."

The Rav knew the importance of emotional intelligence. He was an intellectual giant, yet his teachings demonstrate that he understood that by appealing to emotional IQ, his lessons would have a greater impact, and his students' lives would be more meaningful.

In *Ha'Azinu*, *Bnei Yisrael* is transformed from the men and women of intellect to extraordinary people of emotional intelligence, and this happens through song. They begin to learn how to understand each other. They learn how to deal with the difficulties in their lives, and they learn about their individual strengths.

Humans are more than robots; we have emotions that guide our choices and move us to action. Intellect alone cannot do this. Without a capacity for sympathy and empathy, we would be more like computers than people, which is a recipe for disaster!

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So as 5782 starts to take shape, we should all try to focus more on our emotional IQ and how this affects our relationships with our children, grandchildren, and extended family. Of course, this doesn't mean that one should drop (or not join) a study group! It means we should have a dual focus.

I wish everyone a healthy balance of intellectual and emotional IQs as a building block toward a better self and a fantastic new year!

Ari and Robyn moved to the YIS community over 13 years ago. They have 4 children, Gabriel, Hannah, Benjamin, and Sheri Lee (3 in SAR Academy and 1 in SAR HS). Ari was (un)fortunate enough to be President of YIS when the first global pandemic in over 100 years befell the World and Westchester community causing the shul President to be way in over his head!

Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?

Please contact Steve Smith at stevenjsmith@yahoo.com

The Collective Conversation is a project of the Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

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