

Shabbat Spice

PARSHA HA'AZINU

SHABBAT SHUVAH



My Life's Song: A Unique Symphony

By Dina Kalaty

Parashat Haazinu is a special and unique Parasha. It's written as a song for the people sung by Moshe. Hashem is telling us, through Moshe's song, that when we enter Israel we are likely to stray and struggle, but that ultimately everything is for our best and Hashem is always with us. Almost immediately, the text begins by talking about our unique learning styles. Some of us, at times, will receive learning with stormy winds, and sometimes, like raindrops. *"May my teaching drop like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew; like storm winds upon vegetation and like raindrops upon blades of grass."* (Devarim 32:2)

This comparison is to show us that sometimes we need to be jolted into learning and pushed, and other times, we need a gentle, softer approach. Both of which are necessary and still penetrate deep into our heart, mind & soul. Perhaps, this is also recognizing our ability to learn and grasp information. We sometimes believe that we aren't worthy or capable enough to learn Torah. (Never in a million years would I believe I'd be able to write a piece on the Parasha)!

You wonder if any song has ever been written like this Parasha before. Usually, the music we listen to is positive and uplifting, with messages of love and happiness. This parasha, as scary as it sounds, is also beautiful and filled with love, goodness and blessing. Why then is it all put together as such? Why do we need to hear a song that may create such fear within us? Why not just share the positive and lovely blessings?

Our lives too are made up of harmonies and sounds. Highs and lows. We are meant to have a flow and harmony in our lives, all the difficult and painful parts included. Interestingly enough, Moshe doesn't leave that out. He doesn't just sing of praise and joy. He's singing words of pain, sorrow, despair and sadness as well as tenderness, love, kindness, and care. All of which we will experience. I wonder how the Jewish people felt when hearing it? I wonder how Moshe felt before he delivered it to the people?

Although parts of the song sound daunting and unfathomable, there is slight comfort in knowing that G-d will never destroy us as a people. And to know that we have complete ownership of our choices and lives. *"Corruption is not His- the blemish is His children's, a perverse and twisted generation."* (Devarim 32:5)

Here we see that corruption and difficulties are not due to G-d being "mean," but because our choices have impact. We may sometimes fall short of looking within, introspecting, and being more aware of our behaviors and choices. Moshe is saying that we do have the choice to be better and always choose to acknowledge ourselves; the shameful and more difficult parts of our lives included. Every year, especially at this time between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we are asked to specifically reflect, become aware of our behaviors and wrongdoings. Our goal at this time is not to just sing praise and thanks for all the things we are grateful for. We are gifted this specific time to acknowledge the parts of our lives that we really don't want to, but which are ultimately for our own good.

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In my life, I have experienced many ups and downs. Some of which were more public and some which are private. One thing I know for sure is that honoring and acknowledging the painful parts of my past, both big and small, have created a more beautiful symphony.

Many of you may know that I had a baby born with a rare genetic disease, Wolman's disease. Sarina bat Ephraim ז"ל died almost 12 years ago. Many people suggested soon after she was diagnosed to make up a story and not tell the full truth of what was really going on, in fear that it would hurt our future as a family. I knew deep in my heart that I would never be able to lie about such. After she passed, I was again told that I should throw away some of her things and put it all behind me and just move forward and that everything would be fine. I never seemed to understand that mentality. I knew that I would forever remember her and the experience we had. I knew that my healing would only come with acknowledging and talking about our short, yet invaluable time with our baby, and with everyone involved in our lives at the time that inspired us greatly into becoming better human beings.

I'm so grateful and thankful to Hashem for giving me that perspective and strong trust. I think we all have the potential to create that trust in G-d. He is telling us over and over again in the Torah that we can always return to Him.

We can share anything with Him. If we can't do that, we are missing such a special bond that could get us through life's biggest challenges with so much more ease and meaning.

Recognizing that our lives will most definitely have utterly painful parts and extremely beautiful parts that we must NEVER forget. Our faith is built on remembering our past. Why is it then that we must be told to put our past behind us?

By acknowledging and sharing Sarina's ז"ל life with others, we have brought awareness to our community about genetic disease and prevention, we introduced Chai Lifeline, that now has numerous community donors on a regular basis and perhaps more importantly, I have given my children the tools to live with life's challenges, as I know that they too will experience their own share of suffering and pain along with much joy and happiness, b'ezrat Hashem. Together, creating a beautiful, harmonious life.

My wish for all of us is to recognize that we all have many shameful, scary things we hold deep inside ourselves, some more known, some buried deep inside. May we all become more honest with ourselves as Hashem is waiting for us to share our part with Him and ask for help.

May we all eventually get to a place where we accept our past and future as one whole, unique, harmonious song.

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The Heavens & The Earth

Anonymous

In this weeks Parsha, Moshe gives a 70 line speech to Bnei Israel before he passes away. After that, Hashem has Moshe ascend Mount Nebo. There is much to learn from his powerful and important speech. But as Yom Kippur is on Sunday, I would like to explore one of the things that Moshe said specifically.

Within his speech, Moshe says, "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak! Hear, O earth, the words of my mouth." Why use the symbols in the sentence? Since we know that the Torah wasn't written in a way to be a clear, and simple read, but to learn deeply from, the change in these words show that there is an idea to take from it.

When we are speaking closely to someone, we ask if they are "listening." But when we are yelling to someone afar, we ask "do you hear me!". Is Moshe's phrase trying to point out that we should be close to the heavens and distant from the Earth? Maybe so, but we see that the prophet Isaiah also addressed the heavens and the earth, but the other way around. Inferring that we should be far from the heavens and close to the earth. So which one are we supposed to do?

A midrash states that Isaiah's phrase was actually made as a continuation of Moshe's song. So now what? What is the point?

On Sunday will be Yom Kippur. A day where we strip ourselves from all the physical pleasures of the world. The things that Hashem gives us to enjoy are demanded to be refrained from.

At this moment, we are supposed to be close to the heavens and far from the earth. But should we live on like that? Does the Torah ask us to abstain from the pleasures of the world like delicious food and intimacy with our partners? Of course not! On the contrary, we are encouraged, let alone demanded, to feast, to look nice, to have children! So how can the two co-exist? How can we be far from earth, yet indulge in the earth and elevate the physicality?

Now, this is where Isaiah's comment comes into play. The idea is not finished, we spend Yom Kippur away from earth and going straight to Hashem. But after that, just as in Isaiah's commentary, we reverse the priorities again. We enter back into our real lives where we become distant from the heavens and close to the earth. Does that mean now we leave the heavens out! No! Think of it like this. We buy a plant and then go to the store to buy soil. We are close to the store and far from the plant. We buy water and soil to feed the plant, then are distant from the store and come close to the plant, but not empty-handed.

The beauty of Judaism is that we are not asked to pretend we are in heaven, we are asked to take the water and soil from the heavens and nourish our "earth" with them. The day of repenting and all other days are not separate entities. It's so powerful to bring the heaven down to the earth, to look at the earth and see how much Hashem gave to us.

May we use the powerful energy of Yom Kippur to elevate ourselves, and bring the spirituality back into our everyday lives to elevate this world.

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