

# JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

## Parshat Ha'azinu

Parshat Ha'azinu is a powerful, possibly the most powerful parsha in the Torah. In beautiful poetic language it provides sweeping perspectives on our national development, past, present and future. The messages clear, the words poignant, the multi-faceted explanations all pointing in one direction: a reminder to heed our national calling, to remain faithful to our timeless mission. Without pausing, history and the yet-to-unfold are to be viewed as a reality check.

“Remember the days of yore; Understand the years [of coming] generations...” Deuteronomy 32:7

We are enjoined to see the Hand of God consistently prodding us toward the life of truth. See how previous generations prospered. Recall how their comfort conveniently allowed for the forgetting of God's role in our daily lives. “And Yeschurun (Israel) grew fat and they rebelled” (32:15). Follow the pattern and see how they were reminded Who it is that ultimately runs their fortunes and what He expects of His people.

Any study of the Parsha will offer the reader much food for thought. Even a basic perusal can yield relevant, thought-provoking, perceptions. We have come a long way, and we manifest the signs of a long exile. How many of us can truly attest to having perfectly realized our potential? Are we so perfectly carrying out God's Will as to now retire from His mission in satisfaction?

But that is the here and now. What about the original audience? Were they so far from the Torah that they “merited” such strong expressions? Surely, there were great men and women amongst them, pious and devout, meticulous in following God's Law and Will. Were they not surprised to receive such intense warnings? Perhaps they wondered whether this was at all directed at them altogether.

Even assuming the message would serve as encouragement later in their life, would not necessarily match the warning with the warned. These were, after all, people thoroughly imbued with a love and a reverence for the Torah. Its value was readily apparent to them. It needed no selling.

Have you ever been strongly warned against something you had no intent on doing? Were you ever subject to vigorous encouragement for a concept you endowed with earnestness anyway? How did that feel? Is there any use in strengthening the strong? Here, then, lies the problem: even the masses of that generation were no small people either. In fact, they had earned the supreme approbation of their perceptive leader, Moses.

“And you who cling to Hashem, your God, are all alive today” 4:4

“Alive”, in the above verse refers to spiritually alive- indicative of energetic involvement in following the mitzvos. This compliment, given mere weeks prior to this week's parsha, was directed at the entire group.



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We are, then, referring to a most worthy generation. Were they the ones in need of inspiration in such strong dosage?

Jewish tradition asserts a fundamental principle with regard to the Torah study that states that when we are faces with a strong difficulty in the text, the solution to that difficulty is always close at hand. One need merely examine the verses immediately preceding or following the difficult section to find its resolution. (C.f. Talmud, *Sotah* 29b and Rashi to Genesis 1:26 for a couple of examples.) Following this principle, Rabbi Eliezer David Greenwald, in his work *Keren Le-David* (Romania, 1930), finds the explanation in the section immediately following.

He [Moses] said to them, "Apply your hearts to all these words which I testify against you today, with which you should instruct your children, to be careful to fulfill all the words of this Torah; it is not an empty matter for you, for it is your life..." 32:46-47

Moses is concluding the Song of Ha'azinu. "Apply your hearts to all these words," he urges. While you yourselves may not need to hear it so strongly, nevertheless, in the interest of transmitting this precious heritage onward, the significance of the message must be presented with unmitigated power. That is, God wanted Moses to administer an extra-strong dose of forewarning to facilitate the Torah's message, with all its depth, being preserved for generations to come.

Much emphasis is placed on the transmission to our children. The Torah adjures us repeatedly to inculcate our youth with its ideals, concepts and values.

There are those who profess, in a spirit of openness and pluralism, to allow their children to choose their own lifestyles for themselves. 'How can we force such an important decision upon them?' it is argued. 'Surely, we must allow our children to select the path that they find truly meaningful.' But does this logic really hold water? People who are convinced of the dangers of processed food, generally provide suitable alternatives for their families. Those who equate eating of beef with human flesh would be loathe to serve hamburgers for lunch. The logic is understandable: when one believes something is truly wrong then it is not suddenly "OK for the kids."

Moses was quite clear: "it is not an empty matter for you." If it were empty and meaningless then you would not be passing it onward. The indication of how much we value the Torah is our dedication to an educational system for our youth. Obviously, that which we truly believe in should not die within us. May we merit to ensure that the Torah lives on for the generations to come.

JSN Parsha Team

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3921 Fabian Way  
(650) 493-5764



Palo Alto, CA 94303  
[www.jsn.info](http://www.jsn.info)