Overview

Almost all of Ha'azinu is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons the heavens and the earth to stand as eternal witnesses to what will happen if the Jewish People sin and do not obey the Torah. He reminds the people to examine the history of the world, and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation — that Hashem “pulls the strings” of world events so that Bnei Yisrael can fulfill their destiny as His messengers in the world. Hashem’s kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a land of amazing abundance, and for defeating their enemies. But, this physical bounty leads the people to become over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt the morals of the people. They worship empty idols and powerless gods, and indulge in all kinds of depravity. Hashem will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world.

Divorce - Jewish Style

In times to come, when Israel is redeemed from among the nations and Hashem gathers us to Him, Israel will say “Master of the Universe, it’s written in Your Torah that when a man divorces his wife and banishes her from his life, should the woman marry again and then divorce this second husband, she may never again return to her first husband.

“You banished us to amongst the nations of the world. How is it possible for You to take us back?”

Hashem will say to them “It says in the laws of divorce: ‘When a man will banish her from his house’. I am G-d, not man.”

These words from the Medrash are most perplexing. The relationship between the Jewish People and Hashem is understood to be that of a marriage, of husband and wife. How can it possibly be that about this very subject Hashem would say “I am G-d, not man!”

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Let us understand the Medrash thus: The Talmud teaches us that if a man throws a get, a bill of divorce, to his wife while she is in his yard, the divorce is not effective. For a get to work, it needs to be given. And since his wife is still in his yard, in his domain, there is a deficiency in the giving. It is as though the get never left the orbit of his influence.

Thus, with this principle in mind, we can understand what Hashem is saying: “I am G-d, not man. The universe is Mine. The whole world is ‘My yard.’ Thus I never really gave you a bill of divorce. I never really divorced you at all…” Chanukas Hatorah

Marriage - Jewish Style

Haftorah Hoshea 14:2-10, Yoel 2:11-27, Michah 7:18:20

A Burning Sensation

An unbelievable sight. A young fellow with all the visible signs of an Orthodox Jew walks into MacTreife’s Burger Bar and orders a cheese-burger! He then proceeds to eat it in full view of everyone.

Later he suffers tremendous heart-burn from the indigestible fast-food. Much later however, he suffers an even greater ‘burn’ in the spiritual department.

The Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is called Shabbos Shuva - The Shabbos of Return. The name is taken from the first verse of the Haftorah “Return O Israel to Hashem for you have stumbled in your iniquity…”

In reference to the Torah’s account that “G-d blessed the seventh day” (Bereishis 2:3) the midrash explains that He blessed it with a glowing countenance – a man’s countenance glows on Shabbos in a way that it does not during the week.

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This has been suggested as the reason why we are able to say “sheva brachos” at the Shabbos meals even if no new guest is present.

I shall implore Your glowing countenance...

Sung, My Soul!

I shall implore Your glowing countenance...

Ribbon Kol Hualamim - o hen kug v'kif iucr

“Master of all the Worlds…”

Haftorah Hoshea 14:2-10, Yoel 2:11-27, Michah 7:18:20

The Meshech Chochma asks the question, what does it mean to ‘stumble’ in ‘iniquity’. If a person is already doing something wrong, how can he make it worse by stumbling in it?

There are two aspects to wrong-doing. The offense in itself, and the desecration of Hashem’s name that may result from it.

It’s one thing for a Jew to sin into MacTreife’s wearing jeans, in “plain-clothes”. It’s quite another to waltz in wearing full uniform. It’s one thing to commit iniquity - to give in to one’s desires, but it’s quite another to stumble and desecrate Hashem’s name in public.

Haftorah Hoshea 14:2-10, Yoel 2:11-27, Michah 7:18:20

One of the greatest figures in the history of Diaspora Jewry was Rabbeinu Gershom, who lived some one thousand years ago. He was given the title Meor Hagolah - the ‘Illuminator of the Exile’. Why was this illustrious and august title given to him and not to Rashi, or Maimonides?

Rabbeinu Gershom instituted a number of bans, including one against divorcing a wife against her will, and one against having two wives at the same time. But why was that so special?

As we mentioned above, the relationship of the Jewish People to Hashem is that of a wife to a husband. Hashem ‘married’ the Jewish People at Sinai. Although we were exiled and it seemed He divorced us, these decrees of Rabbeinu Gershom also proclaim that Hashem will not divorce us against our will, nor will He ‘take another wife’ from amongst the nations.

It is for this reason that Rabbeinu Gershom is called the “Illuminator Of the Exile.” Because of his decrees, however dark the Exile becomes, it has a silver lining in it. For eventually Hashem must take us back. We refuse to be divorced, and Hashem will ‘marry’ no other save His people Israel.

Adapted from Rabbi Moshe Shapiro

Parshas Ha’azinu

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