

## Parshas Haazinu

### THINK OF THE CHILDREN

A fundamental precept of Teshuva is that it is not necessarily confined to the individual's personal relationship with Hashem. The obvious examples are transgressions against other people, in the event of which their forgiveness must be sought; and acts of public disgrace – Chillul Hashem.

When Moshe exhorts the people to commit to being God's people, he warns them not to ascribe any negativity to God, because it is only projection:

לֹא-הִשְׁחִית לֹא-לֵאלֹהֵינוּ, בְּנֵינוּ מוֹמָם : דֹּר עֲקָשׁ, וּפְתִילֵתֵל – Destruction is not His; it is His children's defect, crooked and twisted generation. (32: 5)

R' Avrohom Shor points out that by saying this, Moshe was raising awareness of the realities people create. Transgressions and mistakes are genuinely bad – for you and the people around you. It's quite simple – if you gossip a lot, the people you surround yourself with will gossip lots too. If you shout, people will shout at you, etc.

When a person wishes to change, although ideally, the slate is wiped clean, that is not always so simple. There are some things that can't be taken back. Imagine the angry, rude, gossip around young children over a period of time. If, some time in the future, this person wished to change, he could change his behaviour – but what of all the young, impressionable people who observed and learnt from his conduct? The children don't necessarily see the changed man, his Teshuva – they see the example that was set.

This was Moshe's warning – לֹא-לֵאלֹהֵינוּ, בְּנֵינוּ מוֹמָם – wayward children are not God's fault. We are the ones responsible.

In our prayers over the Yamim Noraim, we frequently say how only God truly knows the reality of all things as they are:

אֲלֵ-לֹהֵינוּ וְהַנְּגִילָת לָנוּ וְלִבְנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם – הַנְּסֻתָּרֵת לָהּ – What is hidden is for Hashem; the revealed things are for us and our children together. (29: 28)

R' Ahron Belzer would often remark in the buildup to the Yamim Noraim that sometimes, it's ok to reveal certain hidden things. Let your family see the changes in you, and not go on thinking that you're just the same. This is

especially important regarding young children – make sure that who you really are is someone worth showing them.

There is a skill to receiving a compliment, and stating the truth of things, that does not have to be arrogance. There is nothing more arrogant than faux humility – always be proud to say you’ve work hard for something.

## NATURE AS MY WITNESS

Moshe calls on Heaven and earth to be witnesses and guarantors to the covenant between God and the Jews:

הָאָזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶדְבָּרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי פִי – Listen, Heavens, and I will speak! And let the earth hear the words of my mouth. (32: 1)

In parentheses, it is important to note that Heaven obviously does not mean the sky – there aren’t choirs of angels in the stratosphere. The Torah speaks in metaphors people can understand – Heaven simply means “Beyond”. Earth here likely means the physical, observable universe.

The “action” undertaken is not the same; Heaven is requested to “listen” to the proceedings, literally “to incline an ear”, whereas the earth is merely told “to hear”. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch notes that “inclining an ear” expresses greater attentiveness than “hearing”. Hearing can be done without exerting effort, and without even intending to; but “inclining an ear” clearly indicates a desire to listen.

This is poetic and metaphorical, but still means something, so worth analysing. Why is Heaven a more active participant than earth?

Perhaps it is because while Creation is a fusion of Heaven and earth, Heaven is where the natures and reality of all things are rooted. Things unfold on earth, but more passively, because most (all?) things – outcomes, developments, social conditions, pretty much everything that isn’t based on free will – hinge on extraterrestrial cosmic conditions we call “Heaven” – the control room. Nature is the ultimate servant of God – it has stayed on the path set during the six days of Creation. It couldn’t be otherwise, what with the lack of free will. Nature remains confined to the laws it was created with.

This is why earth is given a more passive role, while Heaven is the back end of things, so given an active role.

As we approach the end of the Torah, it coincides with many of the Chagim. It is vital to remember that all you can do is make a choice – everything else is out of your hands. Be grateful for all the good granted to you, and pray.

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