

# PARSHAS HAAZINU

תש"פ

Haazinu is usually read before Yom Kippur, except when there is a Shabbos between Yom Kippur and Succos, we read it then.

There is a halacha of reading brochos and klolos before Rosh Hashono. This is fulfilled by reading parshas Ki Savo, Nitzovim, and Vayelech—which talk about a bris and the consequences of keeping the bris or violating it.

Parshas Haazinu comes from a totally different angle. The pesukim look at Hashem's perfect attributes of mishpot and rachamim. Hashem created a world that is complete and perfect and runs it in such a manner. We don't always understand it and how it is just. Punishment always comes because we have failed in our mission, but after all the punishments we are guaranteed that we will survive.

The survival of the Jewish people for 3500 years is beyond explanation. Hashem has guaranteed that we not disappear from the world. Our unique beliefs and practices set us apart in the ancient world as they do today. We were a complete phenomenon among the nations. We preserved our uniqueness from generation to generation despite all the difficulties of confronting foreign cultures and resisting social pressures to conform. Keep learning Torah—Hashem guarantees it will never be forgotten.

Imagine, a prediction that a book written 3500 years ago will still be analyzed intensely from every conceivable angle—and people will live by it every single day! This is the greatest testimony to Hashem's promise to keep us around after so many nations have gone extinct. So many cultures produced works of literature and art and philosophy that took the world by storm—and they are relegated to the dusty book shelves of libraries. These cultures are dead—not vibrant and alive like ours is today.

The pesukim say we have to appreciate history. There is no more powerful statement of Hashem's hashgocho over history and world events than the way Torah has survived over the centuries and millennia. It defies all logic.

Sixty years ago, Arnold Toynbee, a famous English historian, caused a tumult. He had the perfect theory about history which explained everything. Well, almost everything. There was one piece of the puzzle that just didn't fit—the existence of the Jews. Because he ignored Hashem's role in history, this historian came to the conclusion that the Jews really don't exist as a proper nation today—we are just curious fossils walking around the planet. This insulted many Jews at the time, but he was absolutely right. We don't really have a reason to exist if not for Hashem's supernatural protection over us.

Hashem has a plan for each nation and took us in as His special people. He took us through the Wilderness and brought us to Eretz Yisroel. But, whenever we get too successful, we take credit for our accomplishments and forget about Hashem. We start to chase false gods which inflate our ego and sense of self-importance. We start to think we are in control of the world. Hashem shows us the truth by hiding His face. When He pulls back and leaves us on our own, we lose our right to exist and tragedies start to come fast. We start to disappear.

Hashem is angered by Klal Yisroel's propping up non-gods as if they have real power. His response is sending us a non-nation as an adversary to give us trouble. This nevuoh is vividly describing our situation today in Eretz Yisroel. Who is the enemy of the Jewish people

in our midst? A non-nation—a group of people with no genuine national history and identity.

The pesukim predict a tremendous churban with some very surprising features. But if we look at Jewish history properly, we would understand it. After the holocaust, people were completely puzzled at the passivity of the Jews who were rounded up by the Germans. Whole villages of Jews were subdued by a handful of Nazis with guns and dogs. Why didn't they rise up and revolt? How could so many be slaughtered so easily? People try to come up with theories...

The answer is right here in the Chumash. It wasn't natural—Hashem arranged for it to happen this way—there is no logic to it besides the will of Hashem. But make no mistake—Hashem doesn't command these nations to perpetrate all this evil. They want to do it themselves. But Hashem only pulls back His protection and allows them to carry out their evil designs against us.

But at one point of history, it starts to turn around. What remains after all the tragedies is a group of people who remained faithful and steadfast through it all. The Jews in Auschwitz sang ani maamin with full faith in Moshiach on their way to the gas chambers. They took a wider view of what was happening and saw that they were being chosen to go through this nisayon to test their emunoh. They were able to see the wonder of Jewish survival throughout 3500 years of history despite the immediate tragedy, and pass this emunoh on to us.

We keep learning Torah and survive all the exiles. We persevere.

At times we get enamored with our own success and start to rely on false sources of power and security. It could be avodo zoro, it could be a bank account and investments, it could be Jewish political influence in the halls of power. It could be the IDF. It could be many things that make people feel we don't have to keep relying on Hashem exclusively for our ongoing survival and success. What happens then? Hashem shows us that there is no way to survive without Him and all the sources of power are exposed as fake. Then it is time to show that there is only Hashem. This is the time for the geuloh.

We are discussing a very deep idea. Despite all the theories people come up with to avoid the inevitable, if you take a look at the world in an honest way, the only explanation for it is Hashem. Sometimes, in order to pull that deep emunoh out of us, Hashem has to push our backs against the wall.

Moshe Rabbeinu speaks to Klal Yisroel for the last time over three parshiyos. Towards the end of all of it, Moshe Rabbeinu says that the Torah is not an empty thing. Rashi says it is not for nothing to toil in Torah—there is much reward. There isn't a single empty thing in Torah—each word, each letter is full of content, full of wisdom. Anyone who learns Torah knows Chazal squeezed drashos upon drashos out of every letter. There is tremendous reward.

Right after Moshe dies, Sefer Yehoshua begins and Hashem tells Yehoshua that Moshe died—and the Torah has become a sealed book. There can be no additions to it. Now it is your job to learn it and delve deeper into it when you bring Klal Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel. What is the message being conveyed here?

Anyone who looks honestly at the world should realize that the survival of Klal Yisroel, the survival of Torah and limud HaTorah is the only constant that has gone through for 3500 years.

When I sit down to learn Torah, I am joining a long chain of generations who have learned Torah before me. There is much room for innovation and new insights, but with the same rules and principles that were there from the beginning.

We have one continuum—I am continuing the same Torah my grandfather learned and his grandfather learned, all the way back. There is not one comment of Rashi that doesn't have tremendous depth and breadth. It could take months to go through one amud of gemara in Kesuvos if you devoted yourself to it completely. This is the survival of Klal Yisroel.

When Jews lived in Christian Europe, they were constantly challenged by Christian clergy and Christian ideas and beliefs. Jews had to remain steadfast while surrounded by a religious culture that despised them and their practices. But nowadays, the churches are empty, the religious devotion to Christianity is greatly diminished from what it once was. It no longer poses a threat. We as Jews outlived the Christian religion—it can't challenge us anymore.

If we could only get rid of all these false notions of what runs the world and what our security lies in. We see all these sources of security crumbling before our eyes. The biggest mussar sefer is reading the news every day.

I read about the new roster of cardinals ordained by the Pope. The most important criteria for ordination was their commitment to social justice and social activism. Religious devotion? Spirituality? Not important anymore—it doesn't sell today. No-one is interested. When I was growing up, Christian beliefs and religious devotion was palpable in the city of Boston. It takes a while for old avodo zoros to lose steam and fizzle out, but all of them eventually do.

Look at our political leaders—each one thinks they have the power and influence to get what they need from their allies to protect them from their enemies, but then something unexpected happens to turn everything upside down.

There were ancient avodo zoros from 3500 years ago which took over a thousand years to crumble. Then there are the avodo zoros which took two thousand years to crumble. Today there are more sophisticated avodo zoros—economic power, military might, technological advancements, and one-by-one, Hashem shows the world how empty and powerless they are.

The IDF is touted as being the most state-of-the-art, the best trained, the most capable of handling threats. But, they can't stop a bunch of Palestinian teenagers from sending terror balloons over the border from Gaza which start serious fires in Israel. Balloons! The IDF can't stand up to a nothing people with balloons. Hashem is showing us we have no power.

This understanding is the foundation of our relationship with Hashem.

We just said Zichronos where it states that only Hashem determines when there is war and destruction and when there is peace and

prosperity. We should never be taken in by the bluster and arrogance of all the politicians who think they've got it all figured out.

Israel thinks America will take care of Iran for them. But when Iran repeatedly provokes them, Trump backs down and does absolutely nothing. Boris Johnson thinks Brexit will solve England's problems and Merkel has her ideas about what will bring prosperity to Europe. But it's all a show.

We have to believe what we say on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in our tefillos. Hashem is making gezeiros right now about what will happen in the coming year to all these nations and none of these politicians have anything to do with it. They are all just little puppets with Hashem pulling their strings.

People talk about the imminence of Moshiach's arrival. They get all riled up with predictions and shouting slogans and it is irksome. But there is only one thing which brings Moshiach—and this parsha tells us that it is Klal Yisroel recognizing and understanding Who is standing behind everything that happens in this world. The posuk says that when people realize there is nothing to depend on, and how desperate we are for Hashem's salvation, Hashem will come out into the open.

The gemara in Sanhedrin has a machlokes if teshuvoh is required for Moshiach to come or not. The gemara asks that according to the shitta which holds teshuvoh is necessary, what if Klal Yisroel won't do teshuvoh? The answer is that if Klal Yisroel will not do teshuvoh willingly, Hashem will bring a danger of absolute destruction and force Klal Yisroel to come to its senses. He will use the non-Jews to bring about this awakening.

One looks at recent history and notices that in the past century, Germany and Russia were the nations who were the most cruel and vicious and who persecuted Klal Yisroel the most. But the posuk says that justice and vengeance will not come to them so fast—until we recognize that everything is dependent on Hashem alone. The moment we deeply believe that Hashem is running the world and do teshuvoh, then Hashem will decide the time has come for the geuloh. It is from our deep emunah.

That realization, or lack of it, is what makes the pendulum of history swing back and forth.

Now is the time to take these lessons to heart and make the cheshbon hanefesh to see how deeply we believe in these truths and integrate them into our lives.

What do we do in the meantime until the geuloh? The parsha says to sit and learn Torah—this is the biggest guarantee of the continuity of the Jewish yishuv in Eretz Yisroel. It is not Israeli tanks or fighter planes. It is not Netanyahu or Donald Trump. The posuk says that it is our learning—being done right here in this beis midrash and the ones across the street and up the hill. That is what guarantees our survival throughout history and our right to live here in peace and security.