

Reaching, and Being Reached

Parshas Ha'azinu

Measured Against Your Own Ceiling

The Ohr HaChaim (s.v. ya'arof kamatar likchi, citing a baraisa in Midrash Mishlei 10 in the name of R' Yishmael) reads the rain imagery of “may my teaching drip like rain... like storm-rains upon young growth, and showers upon the grass” through the ladder of Torah achievement — Mikra, Mishnah, Talmud, and beyond. Someone who has reached Mikra is asked why he didn't reach Mishnah; someone at Mishnah, why not Talmud — each person is measured against what he was capable of absorbing, not against an outside bar.

But the din cuts both ways. The same passage makes clear that reaching far is no guarantee of shelter from the judgment: someone who mastered Mikra, Mishnah, and Talmud can still be found wanting if he stopped short of his ceiling. The comfort here isn't “you'll never be asked for more” — it's that the demand is calibrated to what you, specifically, could have reached.

One Hand, Not Two

On “see now that I, I am He, and there is no god beside Me; I put to death and I bring life; I wounded and I heal,” the Kli Yakar explains the doubled Ani, Ani as rejecting the idea of two ruling powers — one over good, one over evil. It is the same Hand that brings death and life, that wounds and heals.

Ha'azanah — The Effort to Listen

The Malbim defines ha'azanah as tilting the ear to listen with heightened attention — required either by the depth of the matter or the distance of the speaker. He reads “heavens” as both the celestial spheres and Israel's leaders, who pour Torah and moral guidance down to the people the way the heavens pour rain on the earth.

Moshe addresses the heavens/leaders first because aligning the source of influence secures the response below: once the leadership is rightly aligned, the people “hear of themselves” — the way land can't help but yield its produce once rain and dew have fallen on it.

FOR THE TABLE

A person isn't asked why he never cracked the hardest daf if Chumash was genuinely his reach. He's asked whether he grew from Chumash — and so is the person who reached much further, measured against his own further ceiling.

WORTH ASKING

If the same Hand brings death and life, wounds and heals — is there a second address left to blame? Is there one left to thank?

SOURCE

*Ohr HaChaim
Devarim 32:2*

SOURCE

*Kli Yakar
Devarim 32:39*

SOURCE

*Malbim
Devarim 32:1*