

The issues of Parsha Potpourri in 2026 are dedicated
לז"נ ברוך בן חיים זאב ז"ל
לז"נ אסתר בת ניסים יצחק ושמחה ז"ל
לז"נ יצחק מנחם בן ניסים דוד ויהודית יוכבד ז"ל
לרפ"ש יהודית יוכבד בת שרה
This week's issue is also dedicated
לז"נ מרים בת ר' אברהם הכהן ז"ל

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Haazinu – Vol. 21, Issue 48

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כי חלק ד' עמו יעקב חבל נחלתו (32:9)

Parshas Haazinu is replete with allusions to the special relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people, which include a declaration that we are His portion and the rope of His inheritance. In what way are we comparable to a rope? Rav Chaim Zvi Senter explains that although a rope may appear to be one solid object, a closer look reveals that it is made of numerous fibers intertwined and woven together, which enhances its strength.

Similarly, Klal Yisroel is a nation of individuals, each with their own distinct ideas and opinions. When we fuse our separate energies and come together as one united nation, we become a powerful and impregnable force, just like the unbreakable rope. Although no two Jews are identical in their appearance or thoughts (Tanchuma Pinchas 10), it is vital that we still respect and care for one another, for it is only by loving and bonding with our brethren – different as they may seem – that we merit our special status as Hashem's chosen portion and inheritance.

אמרתי אפאיהם אשביתה מאנוש זכרם (32:26)

The Seder HaDoros (4954) records a fascinating historical incident. The Ramban had a student named Avner who left the path of Torah observance and eventually rose to become a prestigious minister to the Spanish king. One year, in the middle of Yom Kippur, Avner sent a messenger to bring the Ramban before him in the king's palace. On the holiest day of the Jewish year, in front of his illustrious former teacher, Avner proceeded to commit the dastardly deed of killing a pig, cooking it, and eating it.

Although Avner had sunken to the lowest spiritual abyss imaginable, he still retained the knowledge that the Ramban had imparted to him. After eating the pig, he asked the Ramban how many kerisos (spiritual excisions) he was liable for his actions. The Ramban responded that he would suffer four kerisos for what he had done. Avner attempted to argue that he was liable five kerisos, but the Ramban gave him a stern look of disapproval. Avner, struck by the ingrained reverence he once felt for his teacher, was speechless and unable to continue.

At this point, the Ramban asked Avner what had caused him to leave the Torah path. He replied that the Ramban had once claimed that Parshas Haazinu, the final lessons Moshe taught before blessing the people before his death, contains allusions to the entire Torah and to everything that will occur throughout history. Avner found this assertion ridiculous, and it led him to cynically question everything he had ever been taught and held as sacred.

The Ramban held his ground and responded that his original contention was indeed valid. Avner challenged the Ramban to locate a reference to him in the parsha. The Ramban silently prayed for Divine assistance, and Devarim 32:26 was revealed to him. Beginning with the second word in the pasuk (verse), the third letter in each word spells the name Avner.

Upon realizing the implications of the pasuk, which means "I will scatter them, and I will cause their memory to cease from mankind," in which his name is hinted to, Avner was overcome by an intense fear and asked his teacher if there was any hope for him. The Ramban replied, "You heard what the Torah says (and its connotations)." At that point, Avner decided to set sail in a boat with no clear destination, allowing it to take him in whichever direction the winds and waves would send him, and he was never heard from again – in precise fulfillment of the words of the pasuk in Parshas Haazinu that refers to him.

בליל יום הכפורים ומחרתו אומרים ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד בקול רם (אורח חיים 619:2)

The Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 2:36) says that when Moshe ascended to heaven, he overheard the heavenly angels declaring **ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד** – Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity, and when he returned to earth, he taught this lofty praise to the Jewish people. Because we are unworthy of publicly invoking this angelic expression, we say it quietly when we recite Shema throughout the year. On Yom Kippur, we are elevated to the level of angels and can therefore utter these words out loud during both the evening and morning Shema.

In the Maariv prayers following Yom Kippur, we revert to our year-round practice and once again say this praise in a low voice, which is difficult to understand. If we were sufficiently angelic at the onset of Yom Kippur, when our stomachs were still full from the pre-fast meal, why are we deemed less spiritual the following night when we have been fasting for more than 24 hours and are coming off the spiritual heights of Neilah?

Rashi writes (Bereishis 28:12) that different sets of angels minister inside the land of Israel and outside it. In Yaakov's dream, he saw a ladder on which the angels of Eretz Yisroel were ascending to leave him, and the angels of chutz l'aretz (outside of Israel) were coming down to accompany him on the rest of his journey. The difficulty with this explanation is that Yaakov had this dream while he was at Har HaMoriah, which is certainly in Eretz Yisroel. Why were the angels of chutz l'aretz already coming to escort him instead of waiting for him at the border?

The Maharal (Gur Aryeh Bereishis 32:2) answers that what matters most is not where a person is currently located, but the direction in which he headed. Thus, because Yaakov was about to leave Yerushalayim, the holiest place in Eretz Yisroel, on a journey that would take him out of the country, the accompanying angels already switched over. This worked in Yaakov's favor at the end of Parshas Vayeitzei, when he took leave of Lavan to return home and encountered the angels of Eretz Yisroel that had come to escort him. Even though Yaakov was still in chutz l'aretz, the determining factor was not where he was, but where he was going.

In light of the Maharal's insight, Rav Yisroel Reisman explains that we can now appreciate that when Yom Kippur begins, we still feel human as the physical effects of the fast have not yet begun, yet we are still able to act like angels because that is the direction in which we are headed, a day of holiness and cleansing with no concern for our physical needs. Twenty-four hours later, we are spiritually exalted and weakened from the fast, but we are about to return to our mundane daily lives, so we are no longer on the level of angels that can say **ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד** out loud.

My cousin Shaya Gross z"l takes this concept one step further and applies it to the laws of Kiddush Levanah (Sanctification of the Moon). Each month, the moon completes a cycle in which it initially appears miniscule but slowly grows larger each day until it is full in the middle of the month, at which point it gradually starts to wane until it completely disappears.

Even when the moon is quite small toward the beginning of the month, we may say Kiddush Levanah because what matters is not its present size, but the direction it is going of getting larger every day. When the second half of the month arrives, the moon appears quite large, yet we may no longer say Kiddush Levanah (Orach Chaim 426:3) because it is now on a path of diminishing.

With this insight, we can now understand more profoundly the custom (Ibid., Rema 426:2) of waiting to say Kiddush Levanah in Tishrei until the conclusion of Yom Kippur. As we leave the spiritual highs we have attained and return to our daily routines, we remind ourselves that the holiness of Yom Kippur may have ebbed away, but we can still take its inspiration with us and continue to wax, just like the moon that we are sanctifying. Although we cannot sustain the angelic level of Yom Kippur forever, we can take with us its lesson that the key is not our present condition, but our future trajectory as b'nei aliyah, headed in a direction of constant growth and improvement.

כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאתיכם לפני ד' תטהרו (ויקרא 16:30)

The Gemara relates (Kesuvos 103b) that when Rabbi (Rav Yehuda HaNasi) passed away, a piece of paper fell from heaven stating that all who were present at the time of his death would merit a share in the

World to Come. Although Rebbi's level of holiness and spirituality was tremendous, why don't we find similar episodes in conjunction with the deaths of other righteous individuals?

Rav Yitzchok Elchonon Spektor answers that the Gemara (Yoma 85b) records a dispute regarding the nature of the atonement provided by Yom Kippur. Rebbi claims the day is so holy and powerful that it inherently effects atonement and forgiveness for all, while the other Rabbis disagree and maintain that Yom Kippur is effective only when combined with confession and repentance for one's transgressions.

The death of the righteous is compared to Yom Kippur in its ability to effect atonement (Gur Aryeh Bamidbar 20:1). Accordingly, although the halacha is decided in accordance with the majority position, in deference to the honor of Rebbi, his death was treated in accordance with his opinion, and all who were present received forgiveness, even if they did not repent.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources that discuss them):

- 1) How many words are in Parshas Haazinu, and what is the significance of this? (Genuzos HaGra)
- 2) The Torah (Devarim 32:7) advises us to ask our fathers for advice, who will then relate it to us (וַיִּגְדְּ), as well as our grandfathers, who will tell us (וַיֹּאמְרוּ). Why does the Torah change the verb used to describe the answers given by the different generations? (Darkei HaShleimus)
- 3) Does the mitzvah to eat on the day before Yom Kippur (Orach Chaim 604:1) begin on the night before Yom Kippur or only in the morning? (Rashi Kesubos 5a, Magen Avrohom 604:1; Aishel Avrohom Botchatch and Yad Ephraim Orach Chaim 604)
- 4) The Shulchan Aruch rules (Orach Chaim 606:1) that Yom Kippur will not atone for sins in which one has hurt another Jew until he has been appeased. Is a person required to pacify someone who is upset at him without a legitimate cause? (Sfas Emes Yoma 87b)

Answers to Points to Ponder:

1) The **Vilna Gaon** points out that there are 613 words in Parshas Haazinu, which corresponds to the number of mitzvos in the Torah, because Moshe alluded to the entire Torah in Parshas Haazinu.

2) **Rav Shlomo Margolis** notes that the term הַגְדָּה is associated with harsh speech, while אִמְרָה is used to connote softer words (Rashi Shemos 19:3). Fathers sometimes need to speak strongly to their children to educate and rebuke them, so their response is described as וַיִּגְדְּ. In contrast, the loving Zeidy addresses his grandchildren warmly and lovingly, as connoted by the word וַיֹּאמְרוּ.

3) The **Magen Avrohom** quotes the **Shelah HaKadosh** as maintaining that the mitzvah begins on the night before Yom Kippur; this is also the position of the **Aishel Avrohom**. However, the **Yad Ephraim** deduces from **Rashi** that the mitzvah only begins in the morning.

4) The Gemara records that one of the Amoraim felt insulted by one of the other Rabbis, so the other Rabbi came to appease him. Based on the details of the original incident, the **Sfas Emes** notes that the first Amora had no legal basis for his feelings. Nevertheless, the other Rabbi went to pacify him. The Sfas Emes derives from this that one is required to appease his friend even if the ill feelings are not legally warranted, because the goal is for everyone to make peace with one another before Yom Kippur, regardless of whether the wounded party is justified in his feelings.