

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 12 Tishrei 5786,
corresponding to October 4, 2025

TORAH DIALOGUE

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HA'AZINU האזינו

Deuteronomy 32:1

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1. Moshe called upon heaven and earth to witness the covenant between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. They would also serve as the witnesses to this document of the song of Ha'azinu. The Midrash states that the choice of heaven and earth was to remind the Jewish people that God had identified them as being like the stars in heaven and like the dust of the earth. The Damesek Eliezer writes that every nation really knows that it could end up in one of three states. It could either be a nation that conquers and rules over other peoples, or it could be a nation that has to submit itself to the rule of a superior country. Or it could be totally independent and not be involved with ruling or being ruled by other nations. The Jewish people, though, are promised by God that they will never know this third state. They will either be dominant to rule over others or they will be dominated as the dust of the earth and be ruled by others. The independent sovereignty of the Jewish people as a nation recognized by other nations in the international arena does not adequately identify the Jewish people as independent enough in a sense that it could be considered a nation unto itself not dependent upon another nation. Dependence might be the situation at hand, striving for a totally independent nation would be likened to striving for the days of Mashiach.

2. *"When I call out the name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our God."* This calling out is a reference to the Torah itself. Every individual Jew must realize the responsibility he possesses in being a representative of this nation and of God's people. Inside Ben Gurion airport there is a billboard that addresses every Israeli as he exits the gate toward the airplane. It reminds him that when he leaves the country, wherever he goes he is an ambassador for the State of Israel. It is a good message for each Israeli but it is a superior message for every Jew. A similar sign should exist on the inside of the door of our homes. When we exit our home we should be reminded that in the outside world, each individual member of the Jewish community is an ambassador for the Jewish community at large where ever he goes, whether for business, for leisure, or just merely to run an errand. Every time he opens his mouth and performs any deed, it should bring credit and respect to the Torah and to Hashem who gave it to us. (RED)

3. We are a people of faith and God also is a God of faith. One Chassidische Rebbe (Rebbe Moshe Leib of Sossov) would state toward the Almighty: "We stand in Your presence and say that God's grace and kindness should be upon us. Just as we pray and wish for this You must realize that we believe in You even though we do not see You and we cannot touch You. We believe in You. Similarly You should grant us the same respect, even though we do not always perform good deeds, it is incumbent upon You to give Your children the benefit of Your faith in us. Accept our words on this day." This is a Chassidische view akin to the legendary statements by the Berditchever as a supreme apologist and defender for the Jewish people. The special percentage of Jews should be higher: those who can state emphatically that we believe wholeheartedly in Hashem's existence and submit our will to His.

4. The parsha seems to imply a need to remember the days of old inferring the knowledge of Jewish history. Rav Kook included Jewish History in the curriculum for his new yeshiva and that we should draw upon all proper sources, classical and modern. All historians have a certain bias. Josephus is the only ancient post-biblical Jewish historian of renown but is suspect by many Jews due to his surrender to Rome and his writing for them. He was the Benedict Arnold of the war against Rome. Yet he was a devout apologist for Judaism and the Jewish people. He saw the moral message in history, especially in God's treatment of Israel. The perception of history and what is important in history is dependent upon the bias of the reader and writer. For example, as Americans we view the American Revolutionary War as a very important event in history. Yet in the eyes of world historians it hardly receives an asterisk. It is looked upon as a footnote in the much larger and longer war between England and France. In truth, had it not been for French assistance the Americans probably would have lost that war. Nevertheless it demonstrates that our identity as Americans influences us to view the events in a different light than the majority of the world. Similarly, events that affect Jewish people will be emphasized in our learning of history. (RED)

5. The Torah describes us as an ungrateful, unwise nation (32:6). The Targum Yonatan comments that we are a nation that accepted the Torah and yet did not become wise. The contrast is stark when compared to the Patriarchs. Avraham Avinu, for example, did not stand at Sinai and he did not receive the Torah and yet was able to attain the highest realms of wisdom and understanding on a spiritual level. In contrast, attending yeshiva and wearing a yarmulke has not always meant that the student has become wise. In November 1995 the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzchak Rabin, was assassinated by a right-wing activist Yigal Amir. Amir, 26 at the time, had studied at a yeshiva and served in the

Israeli Army as a soldier in the Golani unit. Amir was proud of the fact that he was an Orthodox religious Jewish man. In light of his act of murder I reflect greatly on this line in the Targum Yonatan. Amir truly was, as the Targum mentions, part of a group that accepted the Torah and never became wise, never able to integrate and absorb the real messages of Torah in understanding how it should influence and control and discipline one's life. (RED)

6. In the song Moshe states *"His own nation remained God's portion; Yaakov was the lot of his heritage"* (32:9). Rav Chaim of Volozhin was troubled by a Midrashic statement that stated that based on this verse we see that Hashem was happy with His lot. How can you say that God was happy with His lot when God's lot includes the entire world? Reb Chaim submitted his question to his rebbe, the Vilna Gaon, who claimed that the "lot" referred to here was in actuality the nation of Israel. God was happy with the Israel people, even though the people would sometimes descend from lofty heights of spirituality and dwell within a world of impurity. Nevertheless God would never abandon them. He was happy with His lot in the fact that He had chosen Israel as a favored nation unto Him. He will never abandon the Jewish people in the history of the entire world. This is an important statement, especially as a statement of theology. The whole basis of Christianity is the notion that God abandoned the Jewish people with the destruction of the Second Temple and our exile to Rome. This brought forth a new testament, meaning one that would come to replace the testament and covenantal relationship with Israel. The Christian theology has been severely tested only in recent times with the existence of the State of Israel. It took almost 50 years for the Vatican to recognize the State of Israel as an independent nation in the international arena.

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT HA'AZINU 5786

I. From the Text

1. Name the four "Shira" portions in the Torah. (Shemot 15:1, 15:20) (Chukat (21:17) (Deuteronomy 32)
2. Where did Bnei Yisrael display loyalty to Hashem? (32:10)
3. What will happen when Bnei Yisrael prosper and become affluent? (32:15)
4. What is the highest quality name for Yisrael? (32:15)
5. Where did Moshe die? (32:49)

II. From Rashi

6. What was the proper response to a Berachah in the time of the Holy Temple? (32:3)
7. How did Hashem care for Bnei Yisrael in the desert? (32:10) (Hint: four things)
8. What is the "highest" place on the earth? (32:13)
9. Why did Moshe proclaim this Song with Yehoshua by his side? (33:44)

10. What is the lesson learned from the Torah's use of the phrase "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh: in the middle of this day"? (32:48)

III. From the Rabbis

11. Why is Hashem referred to as a Rock? (Ibn Ezra 32:4)
12. What two trees is Israel known for? (Rashbam 32:13)
13. Which tribes lost their identity over the years? (based on the Ramban 32:21)

IV. Relationships

- a) Yitzchak - Nevayot
- b) Adah - Amalek
- c) Aharon - Chur
- d) Moshe - Reuven
- e) Milkah - Lot

ANSWERS FOR HA'AZINU 5786

1. Shira of Moshe, Shira of Miriam, Shira of the Well, and Ha'azinu.
2. In the desert.
3. They will rebel against Hashem.
4. Yeshurun.
5. Mt. Nebo.
6. Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuto L'Olam Va'ed. Blessed be the Name of His glorious Kingdom forever.
7. Hashem gave them food (Mannah), drink (the Well), shelter (the Clouds of Glory), and the Torah.
8. Eretz Yisrael
9. To indicate that the leadership was being transferred to Yehoshua on this day.
10. To indicate Hashem's challenge to the world: Let anybody come forward to try to stop a) the bringing of the Flood, b) the Exodus from Egypt, or c) the death of Moshe.
11. Hashem is unalterable in His relations with man.
12. Date palm and Olive trees.
13. All the tribes except Levi.

Relationships

- a) Uncle Yitzchak (Nevayot was Yishmael's son)
- b) Grandmother Adah
- c) Uncle Aharon
- d) Great Uncle Reuven
- e) Brother - Sister