

*SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 8 Tishrei 5787.
Corresponding to September 19, 2026*

TORAH DIALOGUE

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HA'AZINU האזינו

Deuteronomy 32:1

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED)]

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1. In addressing Bnei Yisrael, Moshe desires to seal the covenantal relationship between the people and the Almighty. He calls upon heaven and earth to act as witnesses to this agreement, fearing that once he dies the people will be able to deny their duties to God. Law stipulates that only if a person is warned in front of two witnesses may he be punished for his crime. Hence Moshe wants the heaven and earth to act as legal witnesses. The Midrash says that God told Moshe to invoke the name of heaven and earth. Tell the people that God created the heaven and earth to serve Him and do His bidding, and they have no choice in the matter. The sun rises in the east every morning because it is God's will. The earth is similarly bound to follow God's plan. If you were to plant wheat, the earth will not produce barley in its stead. The acts of God's creation do not require a reward and punishment system in order to make sure that they fulfill their responsibilities. So should the Jewish people learn from the heaven and the earth that we are responsible to perform God's will.

2. "Let my teaching flow like rain, my saying, like dew..." (32:2) The Abravanel notes that while one must study Torah in great quantity (as represented by the abundance of rain), nevertheless what one says when imparting Torah to others should be measured and in small quantity (as dew), for Chazal have told us (Pesachim 3): One should instruct his students in the most succinct manner.

3. The Mesech Chochma explains (Deut. 32:8) how a nation is to be conducted naturally when guided by Divine Providence. The fundamental goal is that the nation should be governed according to the natural course of events but in accordance with Divine Providence. They should reap and gather their grain, but bring their first fruits to the House of the Lord, to be given to His holy servants, the ministering priests. The people should leave their homes under Divine protection three times a year and come to be seen by the Divine Presence. When they would live correctly, the earth would continue to produce its fruit and the surrounding nations would be afraid to interfere. In their every undertaking, in

their every step, they would remember and bless the name of the Creator, may He be blessed. Such is the spiritual life, of which one hour is superior to all the life in the world to come, for everyone who would contemplate it. It is easy to imagine that in such a society state institutions and a standing army would be superfluous. And this was the path chosen by the Almighty for His people in the land of their inheritance. Hence most of the mitzvot of the Torah are comprehended in the category of the relations between the individual and God, and between man and man, while there are only a few that are national or public in nature, of the type pertaining to society. Most of the mitzvot of the Torah are addressed to the individual, and are directed towards sanctifying the individual Israelite, to render him fit for the world to come, where life is individual.

4. "You thus ignored the Mighty One who bore you; forgot the Power who delivered you" (32:18). The Magid of Dubnov presents a wonderful parable to understand an aspect of this verse. Once there was a person who owed many creditors a lot of money. His close friend advised him to put on an air of arrogance when a creditor approached him. With a cocky and flamboyant attitude, the man succeeded in putting off many a creditor. The close friend was also owed money, and when he approached this person, the fellow used the same tactic to put him off. The friend was astonished. "Do you think that will work on me? I am the one who told you of this trick." Hashem created "forgetfulness" and gave it to us to allow us to forget our troubles and problems. So what do we do with this gift? We use it against the giver and forget about Hashem on many occasions. Essentially, God gave us the power to remember and to forget. We must be sure not to forget what we are supposed to remember and not remember that which we should forget.

5. "And Moshe came and spoke all the words of this Song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea and the son of Nun" (32:44). Rashi and Ramban understand the Song to be the poem that we read today. Ramban writes: "It is called a Song since all Israel always recites it in song and melody. It is also written down in verse form like a poem." But our Sages explained the term "song" used here to refer to the Torah as a whole. In the Talmud Nedarim (38) it is explicitly stated that the term "song" in Deuteronomy 31:19 means the whole of the Pentateuch. But surely the whole of the Pentateuch was not written in poetic form! We must therefore conclude that it possesses the natural and essential character of poetry. Everyone knows that there is a distinction between poetry and prose. In poetry, the subject matter is not plainly set forth as in prose. Additional explanations are necessary in order to

indicate the allusions condensed into each expression. It is still, however, not considered to be merely allegory and homily, but this is the nature of poetry, even of that composed by the unlettered. It is obvious too that one who is aware of the background of the allusions and figurative expressions of poetry can better appreciate its character than the man who has only an external comprehension of the immediate literal meaning of the words, which may lead him to misunderstanding the poet's intention. Such is the nature of the Torah. Its story is not elaborated on and plainly explained, but it requires additional explanations in order to appreciate its allusions. This is not its homiletic meaning but this the plain meaning of the Scriptures. (Ha'amek Davar)

QUESTIONS FOR HA'AZINU 5787

I. From the Text

1. Who are the witnesses to the Covenantal Relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael? (32:1)
2. Who should you ask to find out our history? (32:7)
3. What does Moshe predict will happen when Bnei Yisrael will succeed in life? (32:15)
4. What will Hashem's response be when Bnei Yisrael will desert Him? (32:20)
5. Where will Moshe die and in what country? (32:49)

II. From Rashi

6. They did not say Amen in the Holy Temple. What was the response to a Berachah in the Temple? (32:3)
7. How does Rashi interpret "your father and your elders" whom you are supposed to ask about our history? (32:7)
8. Why will Hashem punish Israel's enemies for treating Bnei Yisrael badly? They were doing Hashem's will? (Rashi in Zechariah 1:15)
9. Why did Moshe refer to Yehoshua as Hoshea? (32:44)
10. How does Rashi interpret "in the middle of the day" for the day that Moshe will die? What are the other two cases for this expression that Rashi cites? (32:48)

III. From the Rabbis

11. How does Onkelos interpret "a vile and unwise people..."? (32:6)
12. Why didn't Hashem kill Bnei Yisrael for rejecting Him? (Ramban)
13. The Torah says that Hashem will scatter Bnei Yisrael. (32:26)
To where will they be scattered? (Ramban)

IV. Midrash

14. Did Moshe accept his sentence to die east of the Jordan River?

V. Haftarah

15. Why is this Shabbat called Shabbat Shuva?

VI. Relationships

16.
 - a) Moshe - Merari
 - b) Aharon - Nachshon
 - c) Aminadav - Nadav
 - d) Canaan - Cham
 - e) Canaan - Mitzrayim

ANSWERS FOR HA'AZINU 5787

1. Heaven and Earth
2. Your father and your elders.
3. They will "kick"; they will desert Hashem.
4. "I will hide My face from them."
5. Atop Mt. Nevo, in the country of Moav.
6. Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuto L'Olam Va'Ed.
7. The prophets and the Sages.
8. The enemies went overboard in mistreating the Jews.
9. Because Yehoshua was as humble now as he was when he was Hoshea.
10. Hashem will act in broad daylight, in defiance of all who wanted to stop Him. When He officiated at Moshe's death; when He brought the Flood in the days of Noach; and when He brought the Jews out of Egypt.
11. A people who accepted the Torah, but did not become wise.
12. Because it would cause Hashem's Name to be desecrated in the world.
13. To unknown places (specifically the Ten Tribes), and scattered and never heard from again.
14. He resisted and argued till the moment of his death.
15. Due to the first word of the Haftarah: Shuvah Israel...
Connecting to the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur
16.
 - a) Uncle Merari
 - b) Brothers-in-Law
 - c) Grandfather Aminadav
 - d) Father Cham
 - e) Brothers