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Parshat Ha'azinu: Is Everything in the Hands of Heaven **Yehudit Mazur-Shlomi, Class of '27**

“Rabbi Chanina said: Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven” (Berachot 33b).

Another year draws to a close. Another cycle of Torah reading reminds us that the words of our ancient texts are not relics; they are a mirror to our present. The painful and chaotic events of the last two years underscore the prophetic precision of Moshe Rabbeinu's final words in his song of Ha'azinu. To me, this parsha is one of the most tragic and yet one of the most uplifting portions in the entire Chumash. We Jews of the 21st century—thousands of years removed from Moshe's voice—are living witnesses to the relevance of his last message.

Moshe begins by calling the eternal elements of creation to testify: “Give ear, O heavens, let me speak; Let the earth hear the words I utter!” (Devarim 32:1). As Ibn Ezra notes in his commentary on Devarim, Moshe chooses heaven and earth because they endure far beyond the lifespan of any individual. They are the eternal witnesses to the covenant.

Moshe knew his people. For 40 years he had led them, defended them, rebuked them, and interceded for them. He had seen their complaints, their moments of weakness, their blame-shifting and fear. With Ha'azinu, he issues one final plea—not just to remember, but to *own* the truth of their destiny.

Rather than blaming God for misfortunes, Moshe insists the people must take accountability: “Take to heart all the words with which I have warned you this day. Enjoin them upon your children, that they may observe faithfully all the terms of this teaching” (Devarim 32:46). Faithful observance means taking responsibility for all the consequences that may arise from our lack of faith and actions that go against the commandments of the Torah.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks expressed it powerfully:

Do not believe, he [Moshe] says, that God is there to serve us. We are here to serve Him and through Him be a blessing to the world...God is not there to relieve us of responsibility. It is God who is calling us to responsibility (R. Jonathan Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*).

Moshe does not shy away from warning about the grave consequences of spiritual abandonment:

I will sweep misfortunes on them
Wasting famine, ravaging plague
(Devarim 32:23–24)

Use up My arrows on them
Deadly pestilence, and fanged beasts...

When and why will this happen?

So Jeshurun grew fat and kicked You grew fat and gross and coarse
He forsook the God who made him And spurned the Rock of his support
(Devarim 32:15).

I believe that these verses reflect a recurring pattern in human history: in times of prosperity, we tend to forget God. Success is often credited to personal strength and diligence, and people take pride in enjoying the fruits of what they perceive as their own labor. Jewish history is replete with examples of kings who, during periods of peace and prosperity, turned away from God. This tendency to forget is not merely individual—it is national. In periods of relative calm, such as medieval Spain or Enlightenment-era Germany, Jewish communities often pursued assimilation and societal acceptance. Tragically, these periods were followed by upheaval and destruction. Even in modern Israel—a nation admired for its innovation and resilience—internal division and complacency have left it exposed to unimaginable horrors in recent years.

By contrast, times of crisis tend to spark spiritual awakening. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, global Google searches for “prayer” surged by more than 30%—the highest level ever recorded—demonstrating how adversity reawakens the human instinct to seek divine connection (National Library of Medicine, 2020).

To prevent this spiritual amnesia before the crisis strikes, God commands: “Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel... so that this poem may be My witness against them” (Devarim 31:19).

This command is the basis for the 613th mitzvah in the Torah, as explained in *Sefer HaChinuch*:

Each man in Israel must have a Torah scroll... If he wrote it with his own hand, it is praiseworthy and very dear... Scripture attributes [it] to him as if he received it from Mount Sinai... And about this it is stated, “And now, write for yourselves this poem and teach it to the Children of Israel”—meaning, write for yourselves Torah, which contains this poem (*Sefer HaChinuch*, Mitzvah 613).

In other words, Moshe’s final message is not just to be remembered. It must be *written*, *owned*, and *internalized*. Not as passive listeners, but as active scribes of our own destiny. Without this song—without the Torah—Jewish identity loses its anchor. Modern Jews often place hope in universal ideals, alliances, or human progress, while sidelining their own tradition and community. The result is often disillusionment and isolation. Ha’azinu warns against this loss of direction.

Moshe concludes with a reminder: “This is not a trifling thing for you: it is your very life; through it you shall long endure on the land...” (Devarim 32:47). Ibn Ezra explains: This verse means that the Torah is the condition for a long, stable life in the Land of Israel. Without it, exile is not only possible; it is inevitable.

Yet Ha’azinu ends not in despair, but in hope:

O nations, acclaim His people! For He'll avenge the blood of His servants,
Wreak vengeance on His foes And cleanse the land of His people.
(Devarim 32:43)

Rashi, quoting Sifrei, comments: "See how praiseworthy this people is—that they cleaved to the Holy One, blessed be He, amid all the troubles that passed over them, and did not forsake Him"
(Rashi on Devarim 32:43, based on Sifrei 333:2).

Despite everything, the Jewish people endure. Why? Because even in our darkest moments, there remains a remnant that clings to God and Torah. Because we return. If we are to truly merit the final redemption promised in this parsha, there is only one way: to unite—not by erasing our differences, but by respecting them within a shared framework of Torah, land, and covenant. We must learn again to write the song of our people—not only on parchment, but into our lives, our hearts, and our future.

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