

# United We Stand

Written By Yehuda Dov Reiss, Talmid of Gruss (YU Israel)

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Parshas Ha'azinu - Yom Kippur

8th of Tishrei 5784

*Dedicated in honor of the upcoming marriage of my cousin, Avi Wolicki  
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## The Parsha's Path

*My doctrine shall drop as the rain. My speech shall trickle as the dew,  
as the droplets on the tender grass, as the showers on the herb (32:2).*

The penultimate Parsha in the Torah is a song of singular significance in that it contains the keys to comprehending the cosmic causality of history. Moshe tells us how history will play out throughout generations and how our fate is dependent on our commitment to the word of G-d, the Torah.

In introducing his song, Moshe states or beseeches that his "doctrine shall drop as rain, my speech shall trickle as dew..." Rashbam explains that Moshe is telling the people that if they accept his words of rebuke, then it will benefit them like the rain. Abarbanel, Sforno, and others understand that Moshe was saying or praying that the Torah will come upon the nation like rain, in that they will absorb it and understand it. Of course, these perspectives are complimentary: If we hearken to the Torah and try to learn and live it, then G-d will draw close to us and give us new levels of understanding, which, as Rashbam says, will "benefit us like the rain." Just as the world is dependent on rain to survive and flourish, we will experience a new level of life heretofore unrealized.

It is interesting that the verse uses so many different metaphors to describe the way in which the Torah will shower down upon us. For example, "like droplets on tender grass" refers to a soft rain on a single blade or species of plant, while "showers on the herb" refers to a heavier rain on a whole field (Rashi). Abarbanel explains that every person's capability and purpose is different; great Sages can and should handle a heavy downpour of Torah, while others may fulfill their potential with a light drizzle. It is imperative that every person fulfill the role given to them and absorb the Torah according to their abilities.

Perhaps we can extend this idea to understanding why Moshe refers to both the individual blade and the field. The Torah can only be fulfilled properly when we ensure that every individual receives and achieves their own special portion in it, as well as when the community as a whole is infused with it. The individual must not be neglected at their level, but we also must not neglect the culture and shape of the community as a whole. It is our difficult role to figure out ways not to compromise one for the other.

In Rav Soloveitchik's book *On Repentance*, he discusses how this season of repentance contains that dual element: We achieve atonement as a community, but that in no way absolves each individual from cleansing himself. Full repentance is impossible on a purely individual level; our purity, our intimate relationship with G-d, must come from our identity as part of a larger community. At the same time, it is ineffective to simply rely on the community for atonement; our relationship with G-d has a personal dimension as well. Our national identity must include our personal identity to represent our complete selves, to totally return and cling to our Creator. With this in mind may we return to G-d successfully with our full selves, and may G-d's word rain on us to nourish us always.

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How do we achieve this dual connection? How do we feel close to G-d as an individual and as a member of a larger community? How do we redefine ourselves as holier beings, as part of something larger than ourselves vis a vis both G-d and our people?

I have the tremendous *zechus* this year - hopefully for good - of being in Eretz Yisrael in the YU Israel Kollel. There is something naturally transformative about being here that is difficult to describe. There is a reason the midrash is replete with descriptions of the special status of nationhood the Jewish people enjoy uniquely in Eretz Yisrael, and the special relationship with G-d that we enjoy here. One appreciates how the midrash could say that one who walks four *amos* here automatically achieves repentance; the very land infuses one with a constant spirit of *teshuvah*, of returning to the Divine. But for those not able to be here yet, there is a central aspect of this spirit that one can replicate anywhere, and it is the foundation of this week's Parsha: *Remember the days of old. Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you (32:7).* Rashbam explains, based on the following *pesukim*, that we should understand how G-d already prepared our *nachalah*, our inheritance, from before any of them were born. Rashi says the verse refers both to appreciating the past and the potential for the future. All in all, the *pasuk* is teaching us that this perspective is absolutely critical to our success. If we learn to live with an appreciation of all that G-d has done for us to enable us to arrive at where we are today and the potential He's given us for where we can be tomorrow, we will be overwhelmed with feelings of both gratitude and responsibility, and be filled with a spirit of love and duty to our

people and to G-d. Of course, this applies to appreciating what we have as individuals, but the Torah emphasizes we must appreciate what we have as a nation – beginning with the endless blessings of Eretz Yisrael, whether or not we currently live there. May this be a year full of gratitude, joy, and the loving pursuit of service of G-d and our people.

## Deeper Meanings

*Adapted from 5780.*

*And die on the mountain where you will ascend and be brought to your people as Aaron your brother did on Mount Hor and was brought to his people (32:50).*

This week's Parsha concludes with G-d's instructions to Moshe regarding his impending death, and at the end of the next and final Parsha, the Torah closes with the account of the death itself. Indeed, all of Sefer Devarim seems to be building up to this point. Why is the theme of Moshe's death so significant? What is the message the Torah is conveying?

Rav Mayer Twersky (Torahweb) suggests that the Torah is highlighting and contextualizing the importance of focusing on one's mortality. Throughout the Torah, we have seen the central role and impact Moshe Rabbeinu had on all of history. Moshe serves as the ultimate model for living to one's spiritual potential. The Torah teaches us that a large part of any such storyline is death. By emphasizing Moshe's death, we appreciate how Moshe did not have endless time to develop into the person, he was or do the things he needed to do - in fact, he finished relaying his message just in time. That conveys a sense of urgency in our own lives to do the best we can to become the people we want to be and do what we want to accomplish, and the importance of connecting to eternity as opposed to living passively and allowing our time to be filled with the mundane and transient. As the Mishna teaches us, *Olam Ha-zeh resembles a corridor before Olam Ha-ba. Prepare yourself in the corridor so you can enter the banquet hall* (Avos 4:17).

These Parshiyos are particularly fitting to read around Sukkos time, as Sukkos is the holiday of vulnerability. As we commemorate our desperate situation in the desert with our reliance on G-d's Clouds of Glory, and show our dependence on G-d's protection as we leave our secure homes for the delicate protection of the Sukkah, and as we read about the vanity of temporal life in Megillas Koheles, we are poignantly reminded that life is fragile and limited.

At the same time, Sukkos is also the holiday of happiness. We do not show any indication of somber morbidity; on the contrary, we celebrate more than any other time throughout the year. We thank G-d for the harvest and have a simchas beis hashoeva, the most spectacular party in

the Jewish tradition. At first glance this would seem puzzling, but this is where the importance of the Torah's contextualization of death comes in.

There is only a brief mention in the Torah of mourning for Moshe's death. While surely the Jewish people were sad to lose their leader, that is not what the Torah wishes to focus on. Instead, the Torah simply offers a eulogy: that there was no prophet like him in the history of the Jewish people who achieved the same close relationship with G-d. This is not a regretful, sorrowful account; on the contrary, the Torah celebrates a life well lived and displays it as a model for all future generations. Death is only as sad as we are not ready for it, and Moshe was ready. Yom Kippur provides us with a clarity of focus, great ambitions, and a clean slate to embark afresh on our preparations for Olam Haba. In this state, death becomes not a tragic inevitable force, but a fitting conclusion G-d will bring when the time is right to conclude a life well lived. We rejoice in the opportunity to prepare for that death by working on our actions and character traits and making a difference. We celebrate the guidance and protection G-d gives us to live a life of meaning and closeness to Him. We acknowledge that time is limited, but we rest assured that G-d will help us succeed, and revel in the infinite kindness of G-d in enabling us to do so each and every moment.

When my great-grandmother passed away, as much as we were pained to lose touch with a dear family member, we could not help but smile at her memory. We were saddened by our loss, but we rejoiced in a life that was truly well spent. Her tremendously giving nature and tremendous joy and Hakaras HaTov personified her completely in her old age, and everyone who knew her felt confident that she went straight to the highest realms of Gan Eden.

As we celebrate the opportunity G-d gives us to live lives full of meaning, let us not shy away from the reminders of death that this season brings. While there is fear, greater than that there is a sense of joy and yearning, and gratitude for the opportunity to prepare.

## Goal of the week

Ask *mechilah* from anyone whom you may have slighted before Yom Kippur and express gratitude to those you've benefited from.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Shelaima for Shaindel Temma bas Rachel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Teiviah Leah, Bracha bas Shoshanah, Reuven ben Golda, Yitzchok Moshe haKohen ben Miriam, and Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

*Have A Great Shabbos!*

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