

Parashat Haazinu

The Song of Moses, which constitutes the greater part of the portion of the Torah read this week, begins¹:

¹*Give ear, O heavens, and I shall speak,
Let the earth hear the talk of my mouth.*

²*Let my teaching drip like rain,
let my talk flow like dew,
like droplets on new growth,
like showers on grass.*

³*When I proclaim the Name of G-d,
give greatness to our G-d.*

⁴*The Rock, perfect are His deeds,
for all His ways are just.
[He is] a steadfast G-d, [with] no corruption,
equitable and upright is He.*

Let us understand the following differences [in expression] in this passage:

1. What is the difference between “to hear” and “to give ear?”
2. Why in the first clause does Moses use the imperative [“Give ear...”], while in the second he uses the future [“Let..hear...”]?

We would have expected the imperative in the second clause as well: “Hear, O earth.”

3. Why in the first clause does he say “I shall speak,” while in the second he does not say “I shall talk?”

We would have expected the second clause to read: “Hear, O earth, and I shall talk.”

4. Why in the second clause does he say “the talk of my mouth” rather than “my talk?”
5. Why, when referring to the dew, does he use the verb “to flow,” and when referring to the rain, the expression “to drip?”
6. What is the difference between “my teaching” and “my talk,” especially since both refer to the Torah?
7. Why did he say “give greatness” to G-d rather than “utter the greatness” of G-d? How does “giving” apply here?
8. Why did he say “The rock, His action is perfect...” instead of “G-d’s way is perfect...,” as did King David?²

¹ Deuteronomy 32:1-4.

² 2 Samuel 22:31; Psalms 18:31.

9. It would seem more appropriate to mention the fact that there is no corruption in G-d's ways before saying that He is "a steadfast G-d," since the former is the negation of evil while the latter is the affirmation of perfection. Why, then, are these ideas mentioned in the opposite order?

The answer to all this is as follows:

The Torah possesses both an exoteric and esoteric dimension; these are called *peshat* ["simple meaning"] and *sod* ["secret"], respectively. The esoteric dimension is not appropriate for all people, but only for those who are like angels. The exoteric dimension, in contrast, is appropriate for all people.

From the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai on, the esoteric meaning of the Torah was always reserved for the select elite that were spiritually refined enough to appreciate it and not to interpret it mistakenly. It is only in recent history that its teachings have become increasingly available to the general public.

Referring to this esoteric dimension of the Torah, the angels said, when the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to give the Torah to Israel: "How much might there is in Your Name!" "Your Name" is the Torah, which is all Names of the Holy One, blessed be He.³ [The angels felt that the Torah, which they perceived as being] only the esoteric dimension, [should not] be given on earth [i.e., to mankind]. This is the meaning of the verse: "G-d our Lord, how mighty is your Name in all the earth, for You have given Your glory over the heavens."⁴ They did not know that since the exoteric dimension of the Torah is not relevant to them—since they are immortal—it was given to mankind.

The phrase "for You have given Your glory over the heavens" may be read: "Give Your glory over the heavens." The angels were thus saying to G-d, "since Your Name—i.e., the Torah—is so mighty—i.e., so sublime and unfit for mortal man, don't give it to them, rather, give Your glory—i.e., the Torah—to us in heaven."⁵ G-d told Moses to respond to this argument, which he did by pointing out how the simple meaning of the Torah refers to all sorts of situations that are irrelevant to angels.

This, then, is the mystical meaning of "Give ear, O heavens." The "heavens" are the holy and righteous people, who although they live on earth are similar to the angels who dwell in heaven. To them it is said, "give ear" to the esoteric dimension of the Torah, since this aspect of the Torah, as it were, is not said out loud [so that all may hear] but rather whispered into the hearer's ear. This is why the expression "give ear" is used; the esoteric dimension of the Torah was communicated only to the righteous, since it is difficult to grasp.

This is also why [—in reference to the esoteric dimension of the Torah—] the verb "to speak" is used. The verb "to speak" refers to difficult language, as in the

³ Ramban, introduction to commentary on the Torah; *Yonat Elim 29*; *Shnei Luchot HaBrit, Yitro*.

⁴ Psalms 8:2.

⁵ *Shabbat 88b*.

verse, “the man *spoke* to us *harshly*.”⁶ In contrast, the verb “to talk” or “to say” [refers to softer speech, used, for example,] when one speaks to women. In our case, it is used [even] for the common men who, like women, [did not learn the esoteric aspect of the Torah].

This distinction between the verb “to speak” (root: *dalet-beit-reish*) and the verb “to say” or “to talk” (root: *alef-mem-reish*) is common in the Talmud and Midrash. It is based in part on the verse preceding the account of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai: “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob, and declare to the house of Israel.”⁷ Tradition understands the “house of Jacob” refer to the women and the “house of Israel” to refer to the men.⁸ This is because the name “Israel” is primarily associated with the Jewish people in their role as the bearer of the Divine message on earth, while the name “Jacob” refers more to how they battle the material aspect of the world in the course of fulfilling this goal. These are the male and female aspects of our personalities, respectively, as we have explained previously. The verb “declare” used in this verse (*tageid*) is phonetically similar to the word for “tendon” (*gid*), prompting the comment of our sages: to the men Moses was bidden to communicate the harsher aspects of the Torah.

The Arizal now reinterprets this understanding of this verse to refer to the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of the Torah.

This is the esoteric meaning of the verse:

“*Thus shall you say*”—this refers to the exoteric dimension of the Torah, which is easy to understand—

“*to the house of Jacob*”—referring to the common people;

“*and declare*”—this refers to the esoteric dimension of the Torah, which is ‘hard as tendons’ to understand for ‘not every mind can bear it’⁹ and ‘not all who wish to take upon himself the mantle may do so’¹⁰—

“*to the house of Israel*”—referring to the holy [elite].

(The reason why our sages said¹¹ that the verb “declare” in this verse implies communicating something ‘as hard as tendons’ is because there is an extra *yud* in it, unlike its usual spelling, as, for instance, in the verse: “Declare to My people their transgression.”¹²)

The spelling of the verb “declare” in this verse is somewhat enigmatic. The imperative of “declare” is *hageid* (*hei-gimel-dalet*), while the 2nd person future is *tagid* (*taf-gimel-yud-dalet*). Here, however, we have what appears to be a hybrid cross between these two, *tageid*, in which the consonants are the same as the 2nd person future but the vowels are that of the imperative (the *tzeirei* under the *gimel* instead of a *chirik*). This draws attention to the fact that the combination *gimel-yud-dalet* (*gid*) is the word for “tendon.” The implication is thus “declare—” (the imperative, following the vowels) “—in a way as harsh as a tendon” (following the consonants).

This explains why Moses addressed [in the first clause of this verse] the heavens directly [i.e., in the imperative: “Give ear...”]. [It was as if to say:] “to

⁶ Genesis 42:30.

⁷ Exodus 19:3.

⁸ Rashi *ad loc*.

⁹ Introduction to *Shnei Luchot HaBerit*.

¹⁰ *Berachot* 16b.

¹¹ *Mechilta, Yitro*.

¹² Isaiah 58:1.

you”—i.e., the heavens, or the holy elite—“it is fitting that I speak [i.e., communicate the difficult, esoteric aspects of the Torah].” And this is also why he spoke in the first person [“I shall speak”]: since he was talking about the esoteric dimension of the Torah, he referred to it as his own, and he was speaking from the depths of his own heart.

Moses was obviously the most qualified to study the esoteric aspect of the Torah, and thus he considered this aspect of the Torah to be “his,” so to speak. “Listen, O holy ones, and I will teach you the difficult, esoteric aspect of the Torah, which is the aspect most dear to my heart.”

But the exoteric dimension is suited [even] for the common folk, so [when referring to it] he spoke indirectly: “Let the earth hear the talk of my mouth.” Meaning: the common people, referred to as the “earth,” should hear my “talk,” i.e., the exoteric aspect of the Torah, which is easy to grasp. He referred to this aspect of the Torah as “the talk of my *mouth*,” since he considered it superficial relative to the esoteric dimension. It issued only from his lips, not from his innermost heart.

The idiom in Hebrew for an ignoramus or common person is *am ha-aretz*, “one of the people of the earth.” Here the Arizal uses the term to refer to anyone—even a Torah scholar—who does not learn the inner dimension of the Torah, for with regard to this aspect, such a person is indeed an ignoramus, and his perspective is entirely material rather than spiritual.

Concerning the esoteric dimension, Moses said: “Let my teaching drip like rain.” The verb used here for “to drip” [*ayin-reish-pei*] also means “to kill,” as in the verse “and they shall kill [*v’arfu*] the calf there.”¹³ The implication here is [that the esoteric dimension of the Torah is] a very powerful revelation, just like rain is not always good for everyone; for example, travelers are vexed by it. So it is with the esoteric dimension of the Torah: it can kill someone who is not fit for it.

The rain falls on the roads the same as it falls on the fields; in the former context it gives life, while in the latter it is an inconvenience or even a detriment to mankind. Similarly, the secrets of the Torah can be a spiritual boon to someone who appreciates them as they are meant to be taken, but can cause spiritual harm to someone unready to absorb them on their own terms.

As the rain is a vexation for travelers, so is the esoteric dimension a negative influence on those who have departed from the path of the Torah.

The idiom in Hebrew for “travelers” is “walkers on the paths” (*holchei derachim*), subtly implying those who walk on paths other than the highway or main road, that of the Torah.

This is similar to the saying of our sages [regarding the Torah in general]: “if one merits it becomes for him an elixir of life; if not, it becomes poison.”¹⁴

For the righteous, in contrast, the esoteric aspect of the Torah will “drip like the rain,” it will flow abundantly and give them life, like an ever-increasing wellspring. This is why Moses used here the idiom “my teaching.” The word for

¹³ Deuteronomy 21:4.

¹⁴ *Yoma* 72b.

“teaching” (*lekach*) is related to the word for “taking”; he referred to the esoteric portion of the Torah as the part he took for himself.

When referring to the simple meaning, he said “let my talk flow like dew,” since dew is good for everyone, just like the exoteric dimension of the Torah harms no one.

Moses said “like droplets on new growth, [like showers on grass]” in order answer the question: if the esoteric dimension is the main and preferred aspect of the Torah, why do we need the exoteric dimension? The answer to this is that raindrops are very small, and are like “droplets on new growth.” (The word used for vegetation in this verse—*desha*—refers to when the grass begins to grow and is just barely seen above ground.) If large drops of water would fall on the new growth, it would destroy them. Once the growth has become a mature grass, the rain falls on it in the form of a “shower,” i.e., with larger drops, which the grass can now endure.

So it is with regard to the exoteric dimension of the Torah. When a person is young and his intellect is not fully developed, he learns the simple meaning of the Torah, for his mind cannot yet appreciate or bear the intensity of the Torah’s mysteries. After he has learned the exoteric dimension—which is “like droplets on new growth”—and “he has filled his belly with meat and good wine,” i.e., the exoteric dimension of the Torah, he may approach the study of the esoteric dimension—which is “like showers on mature grass.”

“Filling the belly with meat and wine” is an idiom commonly used in rabbinic literature to refer to the study of the exoteric dimension of the Torah. (Nowadays we might say “meat and potatoes” instead of “meat and wine.”) The imagery is that one should eat his full of the basic staples of life before indulging in delicacies or fancy desserts; in this way he will be assured of good health and be saved the ill-effects of overindulgence in rich foods. Similarly, a person should make his main Torah-diet from the exoteric basics (Torah, Talmud, etc.) and only when he is firmly anchored and grounded in these allow himself to delve into the Torah’s mysteries.

Alternatively, we can explain this verse according to Rashi’s explanation. He translates the word we have taken to mean “showers” as “storms.” Storm winds aid the growth of vegetation when it is very young and closely bound to the mud at ground level. The storm wind dries up the mud and crumbles it; this frees the grass from being stuck to the mud. Afterwards comes the rain, which makes it grow further.

Similarly, the exoteric dimension of the Torah serves to separate the individual from his gross materialism. Once he has been somewhat detached from materiality and the matters of this world he can go on to learn the esoteric dimension. It will then develop him further, “like showers on mature grass.” For mature grass is already detached from the mud and clay and can bear the heavier showers that promote its growth to maturity.

Studying the Torah's exoteric dimension trains the individual in the fundamentals of Jewish faith; this knowledge prevents him from misunderstanding or misinterpreting the imagery or allusions found in the esoteric tradition. Learning and following the Torah's laws sanctifies the individual, giving him at least the basis of a higher perspective on life in which the spiritual is ascendant over the material.

Moses then said: "When I proclaim the Name of G-d, give greatness to our G-d." This, too was to answer the question of why both exoteric and esoteric dimensions of the Torah are necessary. The answer given here is that the Torah is similar to the Name *Havayah*, which also possesses both a hidden and revealed dimension. The hidden dimension is the Name itself, as it is written; the revealed dimension is the way it is pronounced, as the Name *Adni*.

This is similar to our sages' explanation of the verse: "This is My Name forever, and this is My remembrance for all generations."¹⁵ The word for "forever" [*l'olam*] can be phonetically interpreted to mean "to conceal" [*l'aleim*].¹⁶ The word for "My remembrance" [*zichri*] can also mean "the way I am mentioned," referring to the way the Name *Havayah* is to be pronounced throughout all generations, i.e., as the Name *Adni*.

The Name *Havayah* was allowed to be pronounced as it was written only when the Temple stood—and even then, only in the Temple itself.

So it is with the Torah, for G-d and His Name and the Torah are all one, for [as mentioned above], the Torah is all Names of the Holy One, blessed be He.

Just as G-d's Name possesses both a hidden and revealed dimension, so does the Torah, since the Torah is, after all, G-d's Name.

This is why Moses said: "When I proclaim the Name of G-d, give greatness to our G-d," meaning, "When I recite a blessing and say 'Blessed are You,' you should respond 'Blessed be He,' referring to our G-d Himself, referred to by the Name *Havayah*. When I then [continue and] say '*Adni*,' you should respond, 'and blessed is His Name,' referring to the Name *Adni*."

The Name *Havayah* is considered G-d's proper Name, and in many contexts is taken to refer to His essence (as opposed to any of His attributes). The Name *Adni*, in contrast, is just one of the various Names of G-d that refer to Him as He manifests Himself in one of His attributes—in this case, the attribute of kingship, since the word *Adni* literally means "my lord" or "my master." The essential idea here is that—except in the Holy Temple, where the revelation of G-d is most intense—the average person is not able to bear a direct revelation of G-d's essence and still retain his own independent existence. Rather, we refer to G-d, even when reciting a blessing in the 2nd person ("Blessed are *You*...") as the lord and master of the universe. That is, we relate to G-d as He is manifest in this world. This is, of course, a much lower aspect of Divinity than G-d's essence itself.

Thus, Moses is here telling the Jewish people: whenever I refer to G-d in a blessing as "You," i.e., I address G-d's essence, you should respond "Blessed is *He*," referring to G-d Himself, abstracted from any particular attribute. When I then pronounce G-d's Name (as *Adni*), you should respond "Blessed be His Name."

This is the mystical explanation of why after the first words of blessings ("Blessed are You, O G-d"), those hearing the blessing respond *baruch Hu uvaruch shemo*—"Blessed be He and blessed be His Name."

¹⁵ Exodus 3:15.

¹⁶ In modern Hebrew: *l'ha'alim. Pesachim 50a.*

Thus we see that G-d's Name possesses both a hidden and revealed dimension.

If you then ask, but why does G-d's Name itself need to have a hidden and revealed dimension? Would not the hidden dimension [i.e., the Name *Havayah*] be enough, seeing that it is the main and essential Name of G-d?

To answer this question, Moses continues: "The Rock, perfect are His deeds, for all His ways are just." "The Rock" refers to the Name *Adni*, which in turn refers to G-d's attribute of stern justice. As is known, the Name *Havayah* refers to the Divine attribute of mercy, while the Name *Adni*, when spelled backwards, spells "judgement" [*dina*]. The attribute of justice is necessary in order to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. For G-d wanted to create man with two inclinations—the good inclination and the evil inclination. This is why He is called "perfect," for both inclinations contribute to the service of G-d, yes, even the evil inclination. As our sages explained the verse "And you shall love *G-d*, your G-d, with all your heart..."—with both your inclinations: the good inclination and the evil inclination.¹⁷

The "evil inclination" motivates man to engage in activities that emphasize and aggrandize his material side, at the expense of his spiritual side. If the individual can harness this inclination and use it to see to the needs of those physical aspects of his life necessary for his continued and increasingly enhanced service of G-d, he is loving G-d with both his inclinations.

This is how the sage answered the heretic [who mocked the commandment of circumcision, saying that if G-d wanted man circumcised he would have created him thus. The sage answered: just as] beans need to be cooked [in order to be eaten, so does man need additional perfection even after he has been born the way G-d created him].¹⁸ Similarly, G-d desired that man should rectify the evil within him by his own efforts, and in this way be perfected [by his own efforts].

—translated from *Likutei Torah*

¹⁷ *Berachot* 54a.

¹⁸ *Bereishit Rabbah* 11:6.

Parashat Haazinu [second installment]

This installment continues the passage presented in the first installment.

The Song of Moses, which constitutes the greater part of the portion of the Torah read this week, begins¹:

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Let the earth hear the talk of my mouth.*

²*Let my teaching drip like rain,
let my talk flow like dew,
like droplets on new growth,
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³*When I proclaim the Name of G-d,
give greatness to our G-d.*

⁴*The Rock, perfect are His deeds,
for all His ways are just.
[He is] a steadfast G-d, [with] no corruption,
righteous and upright is He.*

⁵*[If someone] corrupted, he did not corrupt Him,
Their blemish is His children's,
A stubborn and twisted generation.*

⁶*Shall you do this to G-d?
You degenerate and unwise people?
Is he not your Father, your creator?
He made you and established you.*

At the end of the previous installment, we saw how the Arizal explained the verse “The Rock, perfect are His deeds” to mean that G-d created man imperfect in order to allow him to perfect himself through his own deeds.

This, then, is the mystical meaning of “The Rock, perfect are His deeds.” “His deed” refers to Adam, whom G-d formed with His own hands.²

The phrase “perfect are His deeds” is actually written in the singular: “perfect is His deed,” and thus can be understood to refer to G-d’s most perfect creation, Adam. The Arizal now relates this to the following verse from the Book of Habakkuk:

*G-d, I heard what I heard from you, and I was afraid.
G-d, sustain Your deed in these years,
In the midst of these years, make it known*

That in anger, You remember to be merciful.³

Thus, [the prophet] Habakkuk, who was a reincarnation of Adam, said, “G-d...sustain Your *deed* in these years [of their exile].”

Habakkuk heard that G-d was going to exile the Jewish people, and was afraid. Since he was a reincarnation of Adam, the “deed” of G-d, he similarly refers to Israel as G-d’s “deed.” But the mystical meaning of this passage is as follows:

¹ Deuteronomy 32:1-6.

² *Agadat Bereishit* 11, 19.

³ Habakkuk 3:2.

When [G-d] called [Adam] in the Garden of Eden [after he sinned], He said, “Where are you?” [Referring to this, Habakkuk said, “G-d,] I heard what I heard from you, and I was afraid. G-d, sustain Your deed”—i.e., Adam—“in these years.” I.e., even though he will not live a thousand years, at least let him live “In the midst of these years,” i.e., most of them.

Adam was intended to live a thousand years. When he sinned, his life was shortened to 930 years.

From this, we see that the word “Your deed” refers to Adam.

Similarly, King David, who was [also] a reincarnation of Adam, said “A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day.”⁴ It is known that Adam composed this psalm. King David said about Adam, “For I rejoiced, O G-d, in Your *deed*,”⁵ referring to Adam, for [Adam] gave [King David] seventy of the years of his life. Were it not for this, [David] would have had no life at all.

When Adam sinned, G-d banished him from the Garden of Eden. This was on Friday afternoon, but Adam was allowed to stay in the Garden of Eden through Shabbat. He therefore composed the Psalm “A song for the Sabbath day.” When King David re-composed this Psalms thousands of years later, he did so as the reincarnation of Adam.

King David was destined to be a miscarriage, but when Adam prophetically saw this, he asked G-d to grant David 70 years of his own life, and indeed, King David lived for 70 years. This is another reason Adam’s life was shortened from 1000 to 930 years.⁶

David could not be born until [his grandfather] Oveid came and rectified Adam’s [sin of abrogating G-d’s] command “to *work* and to guard” [the Garden of Eden.] This is why he was called Oveid.

Oveid means “the one who works.” Only after someone had rectified Adam’s sin could his prayer be fulfilled.

And parallel to [G-d’s] curse to Adam, “you shall eat *bread* by the sweat of your brow,”⁷ [King David’s father] Jesse was called “the Bethelomite” [literally, “of the house of My *bread*”].

In any case, this is another indication that the word “Your *deed*” refers to Adam.

We now return to the original subject of this exposition: why G-d created man “imperfect.”

And for this reason, G-d desired to create Adam with an evil inclination, so that he eat [the fruit] of his own efforts, achieved through his own toil, i.e., subdue the evil inclination.

“For all His ways are just,” and He does not want man to indulge and enjoy life in the Garden of Eden for free, the way the soul originally “ate off its father’s

⁴ Psalms 92:1.

⁵ *Ibid.* 92:5.

⁶ *Zohar* 1:91b.

⁷ Genesis 3:19.

table,” receiving charity and unearned gifts, before it came into this world. Rather, G-d desired that it come to this world and gather [the rewards of fulfilling the] commandments and [doing] good deeds. Only “then will it rejoice over G-d”⁸ as a reward for its deeds, and not an unearned fashion.

Thus, since “all His ways are just,” Adam had to possess two inclinations, a good inclination and an evil inclination.

And [as well, G-d’s] Name had to possess both judgment and mercy, i.e., the revealed and the hidden, so that if Adam would sin, he could be punished for his wickedness. [For the same reason] the Torah also had to possess both an exoteric and esoteric dimension.

If you ask, how can it be said that “all His ways are just” when we see that there are wicked people who prosper [and righteous people who suffer]? For this reason, [Moses continued in his song,] replying first about the righteous [who suffer]: “[He is] a steadfast G-d,” and may be relied upon to give him his reward, i.e., [his just portion in] the World to Come. This is the same meaning as that of the verse, “...who guards the covenant and the loving-kindness [to repay those who love Him and keep His commandments] for a thousand generations,”⁹ referring to the World to Come, which is the world that is all truth.

Unlike this world, wherein the righteous can suffer.

It is a thousand generations long. [G-d therefore] prefers not to repay [the righteous] in this world, in which life is short.

Concerning the wicked [who prosper, Moses] continued: “...[with] no corruption.”

Meaning: be assured that He is not miscalculating.

The fact that He bestows goodness upon him is because “He is righteous,” and is performing a kindness and charitable act with the wicked person.

Also, “He is upright,” and must therefore reward the righteous in the World to Come, in which there is enough time for Him to bestow on him all the honor due him.

If you then ask: since all the fearsomeness was created only to punish the wicked, it would appear that someone who causes a blemish [through sin] blemishes (G-d forbid) [the One] above. To this, [Moses] replied that it is not so. Rather, “[If] a person corrupts, he does not corrupt Him,” i.e., he does not corrupt [the One] above at all, only “His children [suffer] their blemish,” i.e., the blemish accrues to them, the children, alone.

⁸ Isaiah 58:14, interpreting the second person form of the verb as the third person.

⁹ Deuteronomy 7:9.

[The result of sin] is called a blemish since man possesses 248 members and 365 sinews.

Since man's body is composed this way, it follows that the soul, in whose image the body is created, and which "fits" the body perfectly, also possesses 248 spiritual members, or aspects, and 365 spiritual sinews, or connecting channels.

Someone who neglects to perform an active commandment causes the [spiritual] member [of his soul] that corresponds to that commandment to be lacking altogether. But when he transgresses a passive commandment, it is similar to sticking a finger in an eye: he injures what he already possesses.

A "blemish" on the soul is thus caused by transgressing a passive commandment, by doing something one should not do.

This is the meaning of the phrase, "His children [suffer] *their* blemish."

G-d, however, may He be blessed, "makes plans so that no one pushed away will be pushed away [forever]."¹⁰ He reincarnates the person two and three times, [in order to give him the opportunity to rectify his wrongdoings in subsequent incarnations]. This is the meaning of the phrase, "A stubborn and twisted generation." He brings the person into the world the first time, and he sins. He then has to be reincarnated a second time in order to rectify [his wrongdoings], but instead he makes things worse. Thus, he is called "stubborn." [G-d] then reincarnates him a third time, but the individual returns to his folly. This is the meaning of "twisted."

Therefore, he continues, "Shall you do this to G-d?" He acts for your good, but you anger Him.



The Arizal now returns to verse 3, "When I proclaim the Name of G-d, give greatness to our G-d."

An alternative explanation [of this verse]:

Moses said, "When I call upon the Name of G-d." He prayed about the exile in the psalm that begins "A prayer of Moses,"¹¹ as it is written [there], "Sate in the morning with Your loving-kindness,"¹² referring to the "morning" of the redemption.

Exile is allegorically referred to as "night" and redemption as the "morning" that follows it.

Moses said: "When I pray about the exile"—this being the meaning of "When I call upon the Name of G-d"—"then you should 'give greatness to our G-d.'"

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 14:14.

¹¹ Psalms 90.

¹² v. 14.

This is similar to the idea that “When Israel gazed upward and submitted their hearts to their Father in heaven, they prevailed.”¹³

When the Jews came out of Egypt, they were attacked by the Amalekites. G-d told Moses to send his disciple, Joshua to lead the Jews in battle against them. In the meantime, Moses ascended to a vantage point where he could observe the battle, and lifted his hands in prayer to G-d for victory. “And it was that when Moses would raise his hand that Israel prevailed, but when he rested his hand, Amalek prevailed.”¹⁴ The sages teach us that it was not Moses’ hands that magically enabled the Jews to prevail or kept them from prevailing, but rather, when they saw his hands raised they raised their eyes heavenward and submitted their hearts to G-d, and G-d gave them the strength to prevail.

Although the plain meaning of this is that we should realize that our ability to succeed in life is dependent upon our submission to G-d’s will, the flip-side of this idea is that by the same token, G-d has set things up such that He cannot win His battles unless we “enable” Him to do so—by submitting to His will. Submitting to G-d’s will, on the one hand, is indeed an act of self-abnegation, but on the other hand, it puts us squarely in the driver’s seat, since only by doing this can G-d, so to speak, grant us the power to accomplish His purposes in the world.

Thus, Moses does his part as the leader by praying to G-d to alleviate the suffering of exile. But at the same time, he asks us to “give greatness to our G-d,” i.e., to grant G-d the power, so to speak, to grant us victory in fighting His battles.

Therefore he said, “Give [greatness to our G-d],” which is similar to the thought [implicit in the verse,] “Give strength to G-d.”¹⁵ He, may He be blessed, only manifests His greatness and power when the Jewish people perform His will. This is also the meaning of [the continuation of] this verse, “...His greatness is [dependent] upon Israel.” Even though, [as the verse continues,] “His strength is in the heavens,” he nonetheless only manifests His greatness and power when the Jewish people do His will.

Even though strength is His to apportion as He sees fit, and He can do whatever He wants, He still refrains from exercising His power until the Jewish people submit to His will, so they can be fit to exercise this power.

From this we learn, as well, that G-d will only bestow true success and power upon those who have actualized their Divine potential enough to be able to properly use them. If a person is not sufficiently refined and subservient to G-d’s will, he will misuse the power.¹⁶

—translated from *Likutei Torah* and *Sefer HaLikutim*

¹³ *Rosh Hashanah* 3:8.

¹⁴ Exodus 17:11.

¹⁵ Psalms 68:35. See third installment to *parashat Behar*, on this verse.

¹⁶ “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Lord Acton [John Emerich Edward Dalberg, 1st Baron Acton (1834–1902), British historian. Letter, April 3, 1887, to Bishop Mandell Creighton. *The Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, vol. 1, ch. 13, ed. Louise Creighton (1904).]

Parashat Haazinu [third installment]

The Song of Moses, which constitutes the greater part of the portion of the Torah read this week, begins¹:

¹*Give ear, O heavens, and I shall speak,
Let the earth hear the talk of my mouth.*

²*Let my teaching drip like rain,
let my talk flow like dew,
like droplets on new growth,
like showers on grass.*

³*When I proclaim the Name of G-d,
give greatness to our G-d.*

⁴*The Rock, His work is perfect,
for all His ways are just.
[He is] a trustworthy G-d, [with] no corruption,
righteous and upright is He.*

⁵*[If someone] corrupted, he did not corrupt Him,
Their blemish is His children's,
A stubborn and twisted generation.*

⁶*Shall you do this to G-d?
You degenerate and unwise people?
Is he not your Father, your creator?
He made you and established you.*

⁷*Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of ages past;
Ask your father, he will inform you,
Your elders, they will tell you:*

⁸*When the Most High gave nations their homes
And set the divisions of man,
He fixed the boundaries of [the] peoples
In relation to Israel's numbers.*

⁹*For G-d's portion is His people,
Jacob is the rope of His inheritance.*

¹⁰*He found him in a desert region,
In an empty, howling waste.
He engirded him, watched over him,
Guarded him as the pupil of His eye.*

¹¹*Like an eagle, who rouses his nestlings,
Gliding down to his young,
So did He spread His wings and take him,
Bear him along on His pinions;*

¹²*G-d alone did guide him,
No alien god at His side.*

¹³*He set him atop the highlands,
To feast on the yield of the earth;
He fed him honey from the rock,
And oil from the flint rock,*

¹⁴*Curd of cows and milk of flocks;
With the best of lambs,*

*And rams of Bashan, and he-goats;
With the very finest wheat—
And foaming grape-blood was your drink.
¹⁵So Yeshurun grew fat and kicked—
You grew fat and gross and coarse—
He weakened the G-d who made him
And forgot the Rock of his support.*

¹ Deuteronomy 32:1-6.

This installment continues the passage presented in the second installment, in which the Arizal, discussing verse 3 in the above passage (“give greatness to our G-d”), noted how G-d created the world such that when we submit to G-d’s will, we “enable” Him to accomplish His purpose in this world. In this sense, we “strengthen” G-d, so to speak.

How is it possible for mortal man to “give strength to his King”¹?

We will answer this by first discussing the heretics’ question:² why does the Torah quote G-d as saying “Let *us* make man,”³ in the plural, instead of “*I* shall make man,” inasmuch as He alone, may He be blessed, is the Creator. As it is written [in this *parashah*], “See, now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me.”⁴

As recounted in the Midrash, when Moses was writing this passage, he asked G-d why He phrased it in such a way as to allow a heretic to “prove” plurality in the G-dhead, G-d forbid. G-d replied, “Write, and whoever wishes to err may err,” for G-d wanted to teach us a lesson by “consulting” with the other forces of creation, namely, that a great person should consider the opinion of his inferiors when he is about to do something. Here, the Arizal gives the mystical reason for this phraseology.

The answer is that He, may He be blessed, created all four worlds—*Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*—and in order to connect them all together, he created man, for he consists of elements of all the worlds. It was to all the worlds that G-d said “Let *us* make man,” so that the world of *Beriah* could contribute [man’s] *neshamah*, and *Yetzirah* the *ruach*.

The Arizal here discusses four aspects of the soul: the *nefesh*, or vital soul; the *ruach*, or emotions; the *neshamah*, or intellect, and the life-soul (or “breath of life”). These four correspond in ascending order to the four worlds.

[The *ruach*] is the part of [man’s makeup] derived from the angels, for there is no Jew who does not possess part of a heavenly angel. Therefore, in Egypt, it is written, “These are the names of the children of Israel...”—referring to the angels, “...who came to Egypt with Jacob,”⁵ down below.

Jacob and Israel are both names of the patriarch Jacob, so the fact that both are used in the same verse begs explanation. The *Zohar*⁶ explains that “Israel” refers to the angelic dimension of the Jewish people, which descended into the Egyptian exile together with “Jacob,” their earthly dimension.

This is [the mystical meaning of] the verse, “And the Israelites traveled from Ramses, *about* six hundred thousand foot[-soldiers].”⁷ [At first blush], it sounds as if Scripture was just estimating how many there were, but G-d forbid [that we should think this], since everything is revealed before G-d—certainly something as

¹ 1 Samuel 2:10.

² *Bereishit Rabbah* 8:8.

³ Genesis 1:26.

⁴ Deuteronomy 32:19.

⁵ Exodus 1:1.

⁶ 2:4b.

⁷ Exodus 12:37.

simple as this! Rather, *the Israelites* said about the angels that went of Egypt [with them]: just like six hundred thousand of them went out below, so went out the same number of angels above.

The world of *Asiyah* contributed the *nefesh* [to man].

After this, G-d contributed His portion [to man], as it is written, “And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.”⁸ Note that here it does not say, “And *they* breathed” in the plural.

So here we have the answer to Moses’ question: “Let *us* make man” refers to G-d and the three lower worlds. “And *He* breathed” refers to G-d Himself, introducing the purely Divine aspect of the soul into the person. This is considered here as the “contribution” of the world of *Atzilut*, the world of Divine unity and absolute Divine consciousness.

When a person sins, his Divine element departs [from his body] first so that it not be blemished [by the sin]. The person thus only blemishes the parts of his soul contributed by the various worlds.

It is therefore understood why the Torah says “Let *us* make man,” even though G-d alone is the creator.

This is analogous to a king who gave a *maneh* to a number of people, but to one person he did not give anything, but rather told all the others to each give him a *sela* from what he had given them.

The *maneh* and the *sela* are coins that were used in Talmudic times; there are 25 *selas* in a *maneh*. In the analogy, since the king gave the other people what they in turn gave the one person, all that the one person received may be considered to be from the king. So, too, even though man received his subordinate aspects from the three lower worlds, since these receive everything they possess from G-d, man in effect is created only by G-d.

Therefore, “a righteous person rules by the fear of G-d,”⁹ for the [Divine] portion of his life-soul is within him, which is part of the King, “a portion of G-d above.”¹⁰ He is like the viceroy to whom the king has given his signet ring. As long as he possesses the king’s seal, he is [accorded] the honor of the king [himself], and even the king himself will not contravene his decrees.

It is axiomatic in Judaism that G-d fulfills the decrees of the righteous, as it is written, “He does the will of those who fear Him.”¹¹

It follows that when a person is good and goes in the ways of G-d, he connects all the worlds together and “gives power to his King.” Thus, it is written [in this *parashah*], “...give greatness to our G-d.”¹²

⁸ Genesis 2:7.

⁹ 2 Samuel 23:3.

¹⁰ Job 31:2.

¹¹ Psalms 145:19.

¹² Deuteronomy 32:3.

The Torah then explains how a person gives power to Him, saying, it is because G-d is “the Rock, His work is perfect.” That is, man is His “work” and He created him perfect, giving him a portion of all the worlds.

Why did He do this? Because “all His ways are just.” This means that when a person performs a commandment, the angel [within him] is also considered to have performed it, and it benefits from his good deed. Every person possesses an angelic component, and G-d desires that all creatures be sustained on the merit of their deeds and not live off [His] charity. But an angel does not possess free choice, so he could never be sustained on his own merit; [he can be sustained] only through [the merits of] the person of whom he is a part. The good deed of the person is considered for the angel as if *he* did it. This is the inner meaning of the phrase, “for all His ways are just.”

It is better to be sustained by the merit of one’s good deeds, for otherwise one is living off of G-d’s “charity” and he eats “the bread of shame.” Since an angel has no evil inclination, he does not possess free choice (for he has nothing to choose between). Therefore, he cannot be sustained by his own merits, for he has no way of overcoming obstacles and thereby accruing merit. By connecting man with the angels, G-d enables the angels to partake of man’s merits and be sustained through them.

This consideration for the “feelings” of the angels is called His “justice.”

Continuing with this verse, “[He is] a trustworthy G-d...”:

G-d nourishes and provides for the portion of the person’s soul of life that He breathed into his nostrils. When the person in this world is not occupied with learning the Torah and performing the commandments—which is the soul’s nourishment—when he sleeps, [the soul] ascends on high and is sustained by the radiance of G-d’s glory.

But G-d is “a trustworthy G-d,” and returns the soul into the body, even against its will. [The soul] would have been perfectly happy to remain there [in heaven], for it is the King’s daughter, and would He refuse to feed it? Nonetheless, G-d is trustworthy with [the soul,] the deposit [he received from the person, and returns it to him].

This is the [allegorical] meaning of the verse, “[It is good]...to declare Your loving-kindness in the morning and your trustworthiness at night.”¹³ It is fitting to recount Your loving-kindness in the morning by referring to the trustworthiness that You demonstrate by night, [for in the morning, when people wake up,] You “return [their] souls back into [their nearly] lifeless bodies.”¹⁴

This is the [allegorical] meaning of the verse, “Renewed every morning, [great is Your trustworthiness].”¹⁵ [G-d] not only acts with loving-kindness toward

¹³ Psalms 92:3.

¹⁴ Liturgy, Morning Blessings.

¹⁵ Lamentations 3:23.

man by returning [his soul] to him; He also renews it and strengthens it before He returns it.

People generally wake up refreshed, not only with renewed physical capacities but with renewed optimism and patience as well.

[The quoted verse] thus means, “From the fact that You renew it every morning can be seen how great is Your trustworthiness, for You return to the person more than he entrusted to Your care.”

This is also the meaning of the phrase, “Into Your hand I entrust my spirit [*ruach*].”¹⁶ The *nefesh* remains in the body while the person sleeps, for this is the difference between sleep and death. In death, the *nefesh* leaves as well. But in sleep, the *nefesh* remains, but the *ruach* [together with the levels of the soul above it] ascends above.

This verse is the last sentence in the liturgy surrounding the recital of *Shema* upon going to sleep at night, before the final blessing.

Thus it is written, “Into Your hand I entrust my *ruach*; [redeem me, G-d of truth.]” Meaning: “Even though I owe You, and [You] would be justified in not returning it, You nonetheless redeem me and return it to me, because You are a faithful G-d.”

During the course of the day we generally abuse the soul G-d gives us and cause all kinds of spiritual damage, for which we “owe” G-d reparation, and therefore, He should by right hold on to the soul that we entrust to His keeping during the night. Nonetheless, He trusts that we will fulfill our daily promises to better ourselves and returns the deposit for our use the following morning.

The faithfulness/trustworthiness of G-d is indicated in the next verse in the *parashah*, “He is a *trustworthy* G-d, with no corruption.”

Moreover, [this verse indicates that] He does no wrongdoing to the soul, [as it states, “with no corruption.”] He even returns it, against its will, to this world, for on the contrary, this is for its greater good, as it written before [in the continuation of this verse], “Righteous and upright is He,” and He wants it to be sustained on its own merit.

The next verse reads, “[If someone] corrupted, he did not corrupt Him; their blemish is His children’s.”

If the person sins and causes corruption, he does not corrupt *Him*, G-d forbid, for a person never causes a blemish in his [Divine] life-soul, for it departs as he is about to sin. Rather, “their blemish is His children’s,” i.e., in the aspects of the person he receives from the other worlds, which are the angels [from these worlds], who are “His children.” The blemish occurs in them.

And [the recalcitrant sinner] undergoes reincarnation for his own good, as the verse continues, “A stubborn and twisted generation.”

¹⁶ Psalms 31:6.

If the person is stubborn and does not repent of his sins, he must be reincarnated (“twisted”) into another generation.

The song continues, “Shall you do this to G-d?” Meaning: is it fitting for you to be so ungrateful to G-d, who bestows such loving-kindness upon you?

The following phrase, “You degenerate and unwise people” seems not to be logically parallel. It should have either said, “You degenerate and miserly people” or “You stupid and unwise people.”

In Hebrew, the two adjectives are couched as opposites: “x and not y.” Thus, logically, they should be the inverse of each other, either “degenerate and not-generous” or “stupid and not-wise.” Instead, two unrelated concepts seem to be juxtaposed.

[The explanation is that] “degenerate” here means “ungrateful.” And [the sense of the continuation is that] even if you were ungrateful and did not walk in G-d’s ways, if you were at least wise, or understanding, or intelligent, you would deserve some [Divine] beneficence because of your wisdom. But you lack wisdom, let alone good deeds.

[The verse continues:] “Is he not your Father, your creator?” Meaning, He placed a part of Himself in you, the life-soul He breathed into you.

Betraying this act of goodness is ingratitude of the first order.

He also did the following for you: “When the Most High gave nations their homes....”

This phrase reads literally: “When [He] caused to inherit—the supernal [One]—the nations [their homes],” and may thus also be read, “When [He] caused the supernal [ones] to inherit the nations.” Thus—

[“The supernal ones”] refers to the seventy angelic princes, under whose dominion G-d placed the seventy [archetypal] earthly nations.

And how does each person recognize his [national] identity and people? [The answer is given in the continuation of the verse,] “He set the divisions of man” when He confounded their languages [at the Tower of Babel],¹⁷ and each [angelic prince] was given a different language. The angelic prince corresponding to each language took the nation that G-d gave that language to as his own.

The different language-groups are not simply arbitrarily different ways of saying the same thing, but reflect the deep cultural differences and ways of thinking that define the various races and cultures.

[G-d] gave each [nation its distinctive language and culture] only for the sake of Israel. That is why there are seventy [of them],¹⁸ corresponding to the seventy [archetypal] souls of Jacob’s children who descended to Egypt.¹⁹

As the verse continues, “He fixed the boundaries of [the] peoples in relation to Israel’s numbers.”

¹⁷ Genesis 11:1-9.

¹⁸ Genesis 10.

¹⁹ Genesis 46:27; Exodus 1:5.

These seventy were the roots of all the souls of all Israel. G-d gave whatever He gave to the angelic princes [of the nations] only so that He could extract from them His portion, His people, as the song continues, “For G-d’s portion is His people.”

Even though this process began with Abraham, Ishmael issued from him. [The process] continued with Isaac, but Esau issued from him. [Therefore,] Jacob was the main [forefather], for he was the third, possessing a triple-merit, like “a rope that is twisted from three strands that will not quickly be snapped.”²⁰ This is indicated in the continuation of this verse: “[Jacob] is the rope of His inheritance,” for there was no imperfection found in his offspring, [unlike Abraham and Isaac].

Abraham and Isaac personified *chesed* and *gevurah* respectively. Both of these emotions can lead to excess if not properly balanced. The proper balance was achieved in Jacob, who personified *tiferet*, the harmonious blend of *chesed* and *gevurah*. Therefore, Jacob did not have any wayward offspring, and he is considered the exclusive patriarch of the Jewish people.

After continuing to recount G-d’s deeds of loving-kindness to His people, Moses’ song continues: “[The people] weakened the G-d who made him, and spurned the Rock of his support.”

“He weakened the G-d who made him,” for by requiring to be reincarnated time after time, the person gives the impression that G-d is weak (G-d forbid), in that He is powerless to better him the first time. This analogous to an unskilled potter who cannot produce a well-formed vessel the first try, and has to keep trying an number of times.

“And forgot the Rock of his support.” It does not say “He did not know...” but “he forgot.” For if, in the second or third incarnation, the person would remember what he suffered the first time for sinning, and how he was expelled from Paradise, he would not repeat [the same sins] during these incarnations. But he forgets and repeats them, “as a dog returns to his vomit.”²¹

In this context, the Arizal now explains the following verse: “And then I saw the wicked being buried and coming, and they went from a holy place, and they were forgotten in the city, what they did. And this was another waste.”²² He interprets “they were forgotten” as if it said “they forgot.”

This is alluded to in the following verse: “And then I saw the wicked being buried,” but after they were buried the first time, they return to this world. Therefore it is written, “and coming,” because they were rejected from Paradise. This is referred to by the words, “and they went from a holy place,” i.e., Paradise. Had they then remembered their original sins, for which they were now suffering, they would not repeat them. But they forget all they did during their first incarnation, as it says, “and they forgot in the city,” i.e., in this world, “what they did” the first time they were here, and they “return to their vomit.” Thus, the

²⁰ Ecclesiastes 4:12.

²¹ Proverbs 26:11.

²² Ecclesiastes 8:10.

second or third time they were reincarnated was a waste, for they did not rectify anything, but, on the contrary, made things worse. Thus it says, “this was another waste.”

Generally, it is not people’s fault that they do not remember what they did in their previous incarnations; this knowledge is usually denied us. Nonetheless, the very fact that most of us are reincarnations of people who lived previously should give us enough pause to evaluate our lives and realize that we are probably being tested in this life specifically in those areas that “we” failed in the previous lifetime(s).

—translated from *Likutei Torah* and *Sefer HaLikutim*

