



# *MOSHE IMPARTS WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT & HOPE*

## **YadAv Weekly Video Series: Haazinu/Aseres Yemei Teshuva**

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Haazinu



# MOSHE IMPARTS WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT & HOPE

### Implementing the Gift of Teshuvah

**Torah:** “For this commandment that I command you today – it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, (for you) to say, ‘Who can ascend to heaven for us... Nor is it across the sea... Rather, the matter is very near to you it is in your mouth and your heart to perform it.” There is an argument among the commentators as to which *mitzvah* this commandment is referring.

**Ramban and Sforno:** “This commandment that I command you today” is referring to the *mitzvah* of repentance (*teshuvah*). The *mitzvah* of repentance is close to every Jew to fulfill. If one ceases to sin and has remorse for the past and commits himself to the future, not to repeat the transgression, and makes a verbal confession, then one will have fulfilled the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*.

**Rashi:** This commandment is referring to the *mitzvah* of the study of *Torah*. Regardless of one’s intellectual

capacity or level of proficiency, the *mitzvah* of the study of *Torah* can be readily fulfilled by every Jew.

**Ramban:** “This commandment is referring to the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*. As it states, ‘You will take it to heart and return to *Hashem*, your G-d...’ There is an allusion in the *Torah* that ultimately the entire Jewish people will repent and return to G-d.”

In the *Uva L’Tzion* prayer: “A redeemer will come to *Tzion* and to those of *Yaakov* who repent...”

**Gemara in Tractate Yomah:** G-d promises the ultimate redemption through coming of *Moshiach* will come; however, there is a prerequisite to his coming that the Jewish people must first repent. Since there is a guarantee that the redeemer will come, this implies that there is a guarantee that the Jewish people will repent. They will come to an understanding and clarity to repent and change their ways.

*Ramban*: “Regardless of the predicament of the Jew, although he is cast off among the nations, he will return to G-d. As it says in the verse, ‘...the matter is very near to you...’ Regardless of the location and spiritual level of the Jew, he will ultimately repent.”

*Sforno*: “This commandment is referring to the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*. Perhaps one may think that one need to have prophets in order to attain it. The *Torah* states, ‘It is not in heaven.’ One may think that he needs to attain it with the assistance of the wise men of the generation.

“*Torah*: ‘It is not distant.’ Every Jew has the capacity to repent and return to G-d in his state of exile without the need of prophets or *Torah* sages. Although there are *mitzvos* in the *Torah* that may not be fully understood and one must consult with the Rabbinic court or the sages; however, the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* does not need elucidation. One must only cease doing the wrong and have remorse for what he had done in the past. One must also make a commitment to not repeat the sin in the future.”

If in fact the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* is not as complicated and difficult as other *mitzvos* in the *Torah*, why does *Moshe* need to address the entire Jewish people to give them encouragement regarding the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*? Before the destruction of the First Temple, the prophet admonished and rebuked the Jewish people for their misdeeds. He told them that if they do not repent and return to G-d, the Temple will be destroyed and they will be exiled. The generation did not take heed to the warning of the prophet and consequently the Temple was destroyed. Why did the Jewish people not heed the words of the prophet?

*Reb Yisroel Salanter z'tl*: Why today when we hear the blast of the *shofar* we immediately have stirrings of repentance in our heart and when the generation of the Temple was rebuked by a prophet they were not moved to repent? Because the Jewish people at the time of the Temple understood and appreciated the meaning of spiritual failing and its consequence, they believed that the spiritual devastation that they had brought about was so advanced that they were beyond spiritual rehabilitation. There was no hope for forgiveness even if they should repent. However, today, our degree of understanding of sin is limited to the degree that we know only that we sinned. We have no capacity to understand or appreciate the

devastation that results from our sins. Therefore, it is not difficult for us to repent since we cannot fathom the tragic consequences of our sins.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: When the Roman general entered into the Sanctuary of the Temple, he prided himself that he was going to destroy the house of G-d. He was gloating over his sense of empowerment, when a heavenly voice said to him, “You fool! The only reason that you are able to destroy My Temple is because My Presence has departed from the Temple Mount. You are only destroying stones and wood. It is the equivalent of grinding flour that has already been ground.”

It is only when G-d’s Presence is in the Temple that it is a location that is impregnable. The moment the Jewish people were no longer worthy of that relationship, the Temple became a physical edifice. The destruction of the Temple was due to the spiritual devastation that was brought about by the sins of the Jewish people and not the destruction of the Roman army.

*Reb Yisroel Salanter z'tl*: Regardless of the level of spiritual devastation that is caused by one’s sins, if one sincerely repents and returns to G-d, through the process of *teshuvah* which is a gift from G-d, a miracle will occur that allows for full spiritual rehabilitation and the individual is advanced beyond his original undamaged state because he performed the *mitzvah* of repentance. The generation of the First Temple could not understand how repentance could repair the spiritual damage that they brought about through their sin. They were thus in a hopeless state and did not repent. Therefore, the Temple was destroyed.

*Reb Yisroel Salanter* was asked: “How could the generation of the First Temple not repent? We who are of a far lesser spiritual status than they were have the ability to repent easily. The moment we hear the blowing of the *shofar*, there are stirrings of repentance in our hearts and we return to G-d.” He answered: “Since the Jew at this time truly has no concept of how serious the sins that he committed are, nor does he understand the level of destruction that he has brought about, it is easy for one to repent.” Just as one has no difficulty sinning, one has no difficulty to repent – since there is no appreciation for the severity of the sin.



## Ensuring the Eternity of Torah

*Torah*: “You are standing today, all of you...to pass into the covenant of *Hashem*, your G-d...not with you alone do I seal this covenant...but with whoever is here, standing with us today before *Hashem*.”

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: “What is the significance of *Moshe* telling the Jewish people, ‘not with you alone do I seal this covenant?’ It seems to be superfluous because the verse could have stated, ‘with you who are here and those who are not here.’ It is not only as covenant that you are entering into yourselves, but rather you are entering into it on behalf of your descendants.” Meaning, they have a responsibility to ensure that the future generations understand and appreciate the covenant sufficiently in order to uphold it and to transmit it to the subsequent generation. If they were not entering into the covenant on behalf of future generations, the verse could have only stated, “...and with those who are not here.”

*Torah* in *V’Zos HaBeracha*: “The *Torah* that *Moshe* commanded us is the heritage (*morashah*) of the Congregation of *Yaakov*...”

*Rabbeinu Bachya*: The *Torah* is identified to be a “heritage (*morashah*)” and not an “inheritance (*yerushah*).” An inheritance “*yerushah*” is something that one receives and may do with it as he wishes. If one chooses to pass it on to his offspring, it is his prerogative to do so or not. However, a heritage “*morashah*” is passed on to someone with the intent that it should be transmitted from generation to generation in an untainted manner.

Each Jew must assume the responsibility that the purity and cogency of the *Torah* should be eternally preserved. One must study and observe the *Torah* as well as impressing it upon one’s family to assume that same level of responsibility. The paragraph structure of the Portion of *Vayechi* as it appears in a *Torah* scroll is identified as a “sealed Portion.”

*Chazal*: “Why is the Portion of *Vayechi* a closed Portion (*Parsha stumah*)?”

*Rabbeinu Bachya* citing a *Midrash*: Initially *Yaakov* was about to reveal the end of time to his sons, but he hesitated to do so because he thought that they may not be sufficiently worthy to be privy to this information. Perhaps they were tainted by sin.

However, after he reflected upon this, he concluded that this was not a basis for concern, because the Hebrew letters “*Ches*” and “*Tes*” which spell the word “*Chet*” (sin) did not appear in the letters of the names of his sons. This was a confirmation that they were sufficiently pure to be informed about the end of time.

However, when *Yaakov* was about to reveal the end of time to his sons, he again hesitated and reconsidered because he realized that the letters “*kuf*” and “*tzadi*” which spell the word “*keitz* (the end) did not appear in the names of his sons. This indicated to *Yaakov* that regardless of their purity or spiritual standing the end of time must not be revealed. Why is the spiritual standing of *Yaakov*’s children a prerequisite for *Yaakov* to share with them the end of time? If *Yaakov*’s children had relevance to sin (as would have been indicated by the letters “*Ches*” and “*Tes*”) then it would be an indication that their perspective within the spiritual realm was not accurate.

If *Yaakov* would have revealed the end of time to someone whose grasp of spirituality was tainted and distorted, then their initiatives and innovations to assure the proper transmission of the tradition to future generations would be disastrous. The decisions they would make would be flawed. Rather than perpetuating the transmission of *Torah* until the end of time, they may undermine its purity and cogency. However, if they were free of sin, then *Yaakov* would be able to reveal to them the end of time because his children would have the clarity and understanding to employ their ingenuity to ensure that the *Torah* is eternal and would be transmitted until the end of time.

*Yaakov* ultimately understood from the names of his children that although they were sufficiently worthy and untainted, it was not G-d’s Will that the end of time should be revealed to them. Because “*Kuf tzadi (keitz)*” was not among the letters of his children’s names it was an indication that the initiative that they needed to take to perpetuate *Torah* was solely based on their own understanding and abilities. Every Jew has the obligation to ensure the eternity of *Torah* by not only studying it for himself to become proficient in every aspect, but also transmitting it properly to his children and future generations until the coming of *Moshiach*.

## The Overwhelming Affect Of Torah Study

*Torah in Haazinu:* “May my teaching fall like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew...” The verse is referring to the *Torah*, which has the ability to penetrate the Jew as rain can penetrate.

*Sforno:* If one has a great capacity to delve into the *Torah* than it will have a significant impact upon him; however, even one who has limited capacity is able to be affected by the study of *Torah*.

*Gemara in Tractate Taanis:* The *Torah* is compared to three liquids: water, wine, and milk. “Just as water flows from an elevated location to a lower one where it accumulates, so too can the *Torah* only be acquired and retained by the one who has a humble spirit.” The greater the level of one’s humility, the greater relevance one has to process and come upon the truth of *Torah* to become a repository of it. However, in the verse in *Haazinu* the *Torah* is compared specifically to rain, “May my teaching fall like the rain...”

*Midrash:* “Why is the *Torah* compared to rain? Just as rain can even cause large stones to dissolve over time, so too can the *Torah* dissolve the heart of stone. If one has a heart that is hard as stone, the *Torah* will cause it to melt. If one’s heart is as hard as iron, the *Torah* will cause it to burst. Therefore, one should be willing to sacrifice himself in order to toil in *Torah* day and night.

*Gemara in Tractate Megillah:* ‘If one says I have toiled (in *Torah*) and I did not find (its truth), do not believe him.’ This is the reason the *Torah* is compared to rain.” Meaning, if one truly toiled in *Torah*, since it is comparable to rain that has the ability to dissolve the hardness of the heart, he will surely be affected by it. Therefore, if one claims to have toiled in *Torah* and has not found its truth, it is an indication that he has not sufficiently toiled and thus his heart has not been penetrated. If one has a heart that is hard as stone or iron, it will melt or shatter if he engages sufficiently in *Torah* study.

In the *Uva L’Tzion* prayer before the conclusion of the service: “Blessed is He, our G-d Who created us for His glory...gave us the *Torah* of truth...May He open our heart with His *Torah* and imbue our heart with love and awe of Him...” To the degree that one toils in the study of *Torah* will be the degree to which one’s heart will be affected. If one is fully immersed in *Torah*, he will have a unique level of sensitivity to spirituality and thus

will naturally come upon its truth. Because of his level of understanding and sense of G-d, he will serve Him with love and awe.

## Shofar, Entering into the Inner Sanctum of G-d

*Mishna in Tractate Rosh Hashanah:* A *Shofar* cannot be made from the horn of a cow. The *Mishna* gives two reasons for this. The first reason is that the horn of a cow is referred to as “*keren*” and not “*Shofar*.” Secondly, there is a principle “*Ein kateigor naaseh sanheigor* – a prosecutor cannot be an advocate.” The horn of the cow represents the Golden Calf (*Chet Ha’Eigel*) with which the Jews sinned at Sinai. Anything which has relevance to the Golden Calf must be avoided at a time when we are in need of an advocate. Any derivative of the cow or gold arouses the most serious level of prosecution against the Jewish people.

On *Yom Kippur*, the *Kohen Gadol* (the High Priest) officiated with two sets of vestments. He would wear the golden vestments when he performed the service in the outer sanctuary of the Temple. However, when he performed the service that was particular to *Yom Kippur*, which required him to enter the Holy of Holies, he wore white vestments. He was not permitted to wear the golden vestments for the *Yom Kippur* service because he had to enter the Holy of Holies (the location of the *Shechina* – the Divine Presence) to atone for the Jewish People. If he had worn gold, he could not have functioned in the capacity of an advocate because gold arouses prosecution.

*Gemara:* Since the principle “a prosecutor cannot be an advocate” only has relevance within the context of the Holy of Holies, the location of the Divine Presence, then why is it that one cannot utilize the horn of a cow to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Shofar* since the *mitzvah* is fulfilled outside of the Holy of Holies? Since the purpose of the blowing of the *Shofar* is to cause G-d to “remember” (*zikaron*) the merits of the Jewish people, when one blows the *Shofar* it is considered as if he is standing inside the Holy of Holies. The blowing of the *Shofar* brings about an intimacy between the Jew and G-d that is the equivalent of standing in the Holy of Holies. Thus, at this moment, the prosecutor cannot be an advocate (the cow horn cannot be used). What aspect of the Jewish people do we want G-d to “remember” on *Rosh Hashanah*?

*Gemara*: Should the shape of the *Shofar* should be bent or straight? The shape of the *Shofar* should be bent – “*kafif*” (in Hebrew). Since the blowing of the *Shofar* is intended to “remind” G-d of the merits of the Jewish people, it should also reflect their posture, which is being humble and bent before Him.

*Shulchan Aruch*: Although during the year we recite the *Amidah* in an erect position, it is advisable to recite the *Amidah* of *Rosh Hashanah* in a slightly bent position. This is to indicate one’s humility and submission. The Jew has the unique quality of submitting to G-d. No other people have submitted themselves as the Jewish people have done.

When G-d gave the *Torah* to the Jewish people, they accepted it unequivocally by declaring “*Naaseh V’nishma* – we will do and we will listen.” All of the nations of the world when offered the *Torah* had asked G-d, “What is written in it?” in order to determine if they wanted to accept it. The Jewish people had negated themselves to G-d to such a degree that He had asked, “Who revealed this secret (known only to the angels) to My children?”

The only separation between the Jew and G-d is his own conflicts of interest and agenda. However, when the Jew blows the *Shofar* it recalls the level of negation demonstrated by *Avraham* our Patriarch. He was willing to sacrifice his only son because G-d had commanded him to do so. Although G-d had promised *Avraham* that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in heaven, he did not question the word of G-d. This level of submission is a prerequisite to being able to enter the Holy of Holies. The *Shofar* causes G-d to “remember” that the Jew possesses the characteristic of submission of *Avraham*. If *Avraham* was able to perform the *Akeidah*, every Jew as his spiritual heir, has the ability to do the same.

*Reb Chaim* of Volozhin z’tl in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos* (*Ethics of Our Fathers*): The reason Jews throughout history have given their lives not to submit to idolatry is because *Avraham* had inculcated this characteristic into his spirituality.

*Rambam* in *The Laws of Repentance*: “Although the obligation of blowing of the *Shofar* is a Divine Decree in the *Torah*, simultaneously the blowing of the *Shofar* is also an allusion (*remez*).” The message that the *Shofar* conveys is – all those who are asleep or in a deep slumber should awaken. They should

introspect and reflect on their past behavior and do *teshuvah* (repent). Part of the *teshuvah* process is to remember one’s Creator. Those who are in a slumber have forgotten the truth because they are consumed with the vanities of time. They occupy themselves completely with pursuits of vanity and emptiness, which have no value. Gaze upon your souls and better yourselves and abandon your evil ways and improper thoughts.” The *Shofar* awakens that which is dormant within the Jew because he has the inherent ability to submit to G-d.

## **G-d’s Love for the Jewish People**

*Torah*: At the end of time the Jewish people will eventually do *teshuvah* and return to G-d. As a result of this, G-d will bring forth great blessing to the Jews and He will, “...return to rejoice (*I’sus*) over you (the Jewish People) for good, as He rejoiced (*sos*) over your forefathers, when you listen to the voice of *Hashem*, your G-d...” The *Torah* uses the term “*sos*” to refer to the joy that G-d will feel at this time. Why does the *Torah* use the term “*sos*” rather than “*simcha*” or many other expressions of rejoicing?

King David in *Psalms*: “I rejoice (*sos*) over your words (the *Torah*) as if I found a large amount of spoils.” King David could have expressed his joy over the *Torah* and *mitzvos* with other terms, however, he specifically chose this term.

*Vilna Gaon z’tl*: The word “*simcha*” indicates joy that is complete, while the term “*sos*” denotes a happiness that is incomplete. This can be explained through the following parable: In order for the king to reward his loyal subject for his service, he allows him to enter into his royal treasury and take whatever his heart desires but only for a period of five minutes. The subject is joyful and thankful that he will be allowed to take whatever he wants from the royal treasury. However, he is also anguished by the time constraint he is given because he understands the opportunity at hand. Similarly, King David rejoiced over the *Torah* that he was given because he understood its infinite value. However, at the same time he was distressed by the fact that he was restricted to seventy years and would not be able to partake of this treasure beyond that point.

With this explanation we can understand why the *Torah* uses the term “*sos*” to express G-d’s joy and



not the term “*simcha*.” G-d loves the Jewish people to such a degree that even though so much blessing is bestowed upon us, He is pained that He could not give us more. Since G-d is infinite with no restrictions, He wants to provide us with boundless blessing as well but because of our own limitations, He is unable to do so. If G-d loves the Jews to such a degree that it gives him pain not to be able to do more for us, then we should understand that when He denies us His Goodness, it is clearly in our best interest.

Now we can somewhat appreciate the idea that because of G-d’s unending love for us that even when we experience a set back in life we can understand that it emanates from His Goodness and not from vindictiveness. If He could give us more, He would. Therefore, the *Mishna* states, “Just as one blesses G-d for good fortune, he must bless Him for misfortune.” Because of his unlimited love for the Jewish people, He does only what is good and necessary for us.

*Reb Chaim of Volozhin z’tl*: If punishment and suffering are necessary as part of the rehabilitative spiritual process (which is only in our best interest), then why should one pray to G-d to heal him when he becomes ill? Does one ask the doctor to withhold a life-saving procedure when the only road to recovery is through that procedure? If so, then how do we understand the blessing of the *Amidah* – “Heal us *Hashem* and allow us to recover”?

*Reb Chaim*: Although G-d brings illness upon a person as part of the rehabilitation of his spirituality (which is a positive thing), G-d is nevertheless affected by the fact that the Jew is in a state of suffering. It is similar to a parent who needs to assist the doctor when he performs a painful procedure to his child. The parent is joyful that the child will recover through this procedure; however, the parent feels the hurt of his child. Therefore, if one prays for healing because he feels G-d’s pain (as a father to a child – and even to a greater degree) then that feeling itself becomes the rehabilitative process that causes the person to be deserving of recovery. One can only relate to G-d’s pain (when a Jew is in a state of suffering) if one understands to what degree G-d loves the Jewish people.

## Accept Upon Yourself My Kingship

*Rosh Hashanah* is the day of Judgment when G-d’s exacting justice comes upon all existence. Every living

being is judged for life or death for the coming year. G-d’s judgment is so intense at this time that even the angels in heaven tremble from it. One would think that at such a time, when standing in judgment, one should repent and supplicate G-d for forgiveness. Nevertheless, in the prayer service of *Rosh Hashanah* there is no mention of confession or repentance. In fact, one does not discuss anything relating to himself, but rather, one only prays for the glory of G-d and His Kingship in existence. Why is this so?

*Chazal*: On the day of Judgment, *satan* is permitted to come before G-d and prosecute the Jewish people. The only way his prosecution can be silenced is with the blowing of the *shofar*. The sounding of the *shofar* has the ability to silence *satan* because it reminds G-d of the *Akeidah* (binding of *Yitzchak*). Although *Avraham* was willing to slaughter his only beloved son, *Yitzchak* for G-d, at the last moment an angel called to him from heaven and told him to withdraw his hand from the lad. Soon after, *Avraham* saw a ram caught in the thicket near by, and he immediately understood that it there for him to actualize the service of the *Akeidah*. He was to slaughter the ram in the stead of *Yitzchak*. Because of *Avraham*’s level of dedication and self-negation for the sake of G-d even the most intense prosecution against the Jewish people will be silenced in the merit of the *Akeidah*, through the blowing of the *shofar*.

This year, however, the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* coincides with the Shabbos. The Rabbis legislated that the Jewish people are not permitted to blow the *shofar* when *Rosh Hashanah* falls on the Shabbos, because there may be an individual who is not proficient in its blowing and may transport the *shofar* four cubits in public domain in order to find someone who will instruct him how to blow it. At this particular time, how could *satan* be silenced if there is no *shofar* to counter his prosecution? In addition, why did the Rabbis suspend the blowing of the *shofar*, which is the mechanism to silence the prosecution of *satan* against the entire Jewish people, over a concern that an insignificantly small number of people may actually transport the *shofar* in public domain?

*Reb Meir Simcha* of Dvinsk: What silences *satan* is the Jew’s dedication to G-d’s glory. It was *Avraham*’s negation of himself for the sake of carrying out the Will of G-d that silences *satan*. *Avraham* did not for a moment take into consideration his personal loss or the future

of the Jewish people, who were destined to be led by his son *Yitzchak* the future Patriarch. The blowing of the ram's horn, reminds G-d of the sacrifice that was made on His behalf.

Identically, on the day of judgment, when the prosecution against the Jewish people is at an overwhelming level, it is fitting for them to negate their own needs for the sake of G-d's Honor and Glory. Our only concern on this day is the desecration of G-d's Name in the world because of the evil that exists. We supplicate Him to bring that to an end so that all humanity should recognize Him as The Master. By not addressing one's needs and focusing only on G-d, the King, this causes the Jew to be seen as a dedicated subject and servant of G-d, thus evoking the ultimate level of Mercy from Him.

Although the concern for an individual who may transport the *shofar* four cubits in public domain is seemingly inconsequential as compared to the whole picture; however, because the desecration of

the Shabbos is a desecration of G-d we are willing to forfeit the opportunity to silence *satan* through the *shofar* and be seen in a positive light. Therefore, when *satan* comes before G-d on *Rosh Hashanah* and begins auditing the spiritual record of the Jewish people in the most incriminating manner, and there is no *shofar* to silence him, G-d will respond by telling him that the absence of the *shofar* is greater than the actual blowing because it demonstrates the ultimate sacrifice, that the Jewish people are willing to make on behalf of His Glory and Honor.

If one focuses on G-d's Glory and Kingship on *Rosh Hashanah* it will allow one to be the greatest beneficiary of the day. If G-d wants the Jewish people to acknowledge Him as their King and accept His Kingship, in fact He wants them to dedicate their lives to Him as His subjects. One must feel that he is no more than a chattel of G-d. This perspective and mindset is a basis for having a positive judgment on *Rosh Hashanah*.



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