

A discourse on  
**Ha'azinu and Rosh Hashanah**

from Harav Yitzhak Ginsburgh

In most years, the *parashah* that we read on *Shabbat Shuvah* (a.k.a., *Shabbat Teshuvah*)—the Shabbat between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kipur*—is *parashat Ha'azinu*. Because of this, *Rosh Hashanah* usually occurs in the week of *parashat Ha'azinu*, meaning that the daily Torah reading for the two days of *Rosh Hashanah* are usually two portions from *parashat Ha'azinu*. So, we need to look at what the connection between the two days of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Ha'azinu* is.

### Bridging the Ten Commandments with the Ten Utterances

*Ha'azinu*, the great song of the Torah, is generally referred to as the song of Moshe. But, as we will see, from the Chassidic commentaries it becomes clear that Moshe together with Joshua sang this song.

We will begin with the *S'fat Emet*, who explains<sup>1</sup> that the first verse of this *parashah* divides into two phrases:

“Hear O heavens and I will speak,” alludes to the Ten Commandments.

“And the earth shall hear the utterances of my mouth,” alludes to the Ten Utterances with which the Almighty created the world.

The *S'fat Emet* further explains that the Ten Commandments are the essence of the Written Torah and the Ten utterances are the essence of the Oral Torah. Because the first verse of the song of *Ha'azinu* joins the Ten Commandments with the Ten Utterances, we learn that this week's *parasha's* purpose is to create a bridge, a connection, between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.

The verse that alludes to both “tens,” the Ten Commandments and the Ten Utterances, is: “ten, ten, each pan,”<sup>2</sup> where each “ten” alludes to one set. In Hebrew, the word “pan” is כַּף, whose numerical value is 100. Indeed, “ten [commandments]” times “ten [utterances]” is 100. In mathematics, multiplication represents the consummate joining of two numbers, much more so than addition. Thus, this verse fragment demands that we indeed unify the Ten Commandments (the giving of the Torah) with the Ten Utterances (the creation of the world).

The *Ba'al Haturim* provides us with another meditation that strengthens our present analysis. Regarding the correspondence between the first half of the verse and the Written Torah, he writes that the numerical value of the words “...heavens and I will speak” (הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶדְבַּרָה) is 613, the number of commandments in the Written Torah!<sup>3</sup> As mentioned many times in the past, 613 is also the numerical value of Moshe Rabbeinu (מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ), thus strengthening the correspondence of Moshe Rabbeinu and the Written Torah.



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2 Hausner St. • Jerusalem 96431 • tel.: 972.547.533770 • info@gpsociety.org

## Bridging the leadership of Moshe and Joshua

Recall that in last week's *parashah*, Moshe was informed by the Almighty that his death was approaching and that he was to come together with Joshua into the Tabernacle so that God could command them together. Once there, God taught Moshe and Joshua together the song of *Ha'azinu*. So the song of *Ha'azinu* is a joint prophecy, prophesied by Moshe and his heir, Joshua, as one. It is not difficult to imagine that when Moshe fulfilled God's command that he teach this song to the entire people, Joshua was standing at his side.

Whereas Moshe would pass away in the desert, it would be Joshua's task to lead the Jewish people into the Land of Israel and conquer it. Conquering the land symbolizes the development of the Oral Torah, the aspect of God's will that is sensitive to the earth ("And the earth shall hear the utterances of my mouth"), i.e., sensitive to reality, and realizes that without God's will being integrated into the mundane, the purpose of creation, which is to make the Almighty a dwelling place below, cannot be fulfilled. The Oral Torah accepts the world for what it is, and therefore does not strive to disband it, but to enhance and elevate it. At the same time, the Written Torah is above and beyond reality, striving to create an ideal state. Indeed, because of its distance from reality as we know it, the Written Torah can be used to create alternate realities, as is explained in length in Kabbalistic writings.

Joshua represents the beginning of the Oral Torah. But, Moshe Rabbeinu represents the Written Torah, the word of God spoken at Mt. Sinai and described by the prophets as that which shatters boulders,<sup>4</sup> implying a lack of sensitivity to the mundane; without the Oral Torah, the Written Torah cannot be integrated into the mundane.

Whereas Moshe Rabbeinu represents leadership that is centered on the Written Torah, Joshua represents leadership that is centered on the Oral Torah, which is studied and restudied. Indeed, it was Joshua who was commanded by the Almighty "Do not remove this book of the Torah from your mouth; you shall study it day and night..."<sup>5</sup> Connecting the Written Torah with the Oral Torah is akin to bridging the heavens with the earth, the spiritual with the physical and Divine wisdom with science, as explained in length elsewhere.

Regarding the connection between the second part of the first verse, Joshua and the Oral Torah, the *Ba'al Haturim* notes that the word "And it [the earth] shall hear," with this particular spelling and vowel signs, appears only one more time in the entire Bible, in the verse: "...For Your Name is in this house, and we have called you from our calamity, and You shall hear, and You shall save."<sup>6</sup> These words were prayed by Yehoshafat, one of the most righteous kings of Judah, when faced with an impending war with the Moabites. Even though these two instances of the same pronunciation of this word are grammatically different (in *Ha'azinu*, it appears as a second person feminine verb, in *Chronicles* it is a second person masculine verb), these two instances are connected. The *Ba'al Haturim* explains that the similar word appearing in both verses comes to teach us that if we hear (like the earth) the words of the Oral Torah, we will merit that when we call out to the Almighty (as in *Chronicles*), He will surely save us. Indeed the word "salvation" in Hebrew, ישועה, permutes to spell "Joshua," יהושע.

## Bridging between kingdoms

In Kabbalistic terminology, *Rosh Hashanah* is described as the beginning of the construction of the *sefirah* of kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Kingdom represents God's sovereignty over the world. Since God wishes to rule over willing subjects, as we say every day: "His [God's] sovereignty they [the Jewish people] accepted willingly," construction of the *sefirah* of kingdom depends on us. Our ability to assemble the *sefirah* of kingdom—the revelation of God's sovereignty over the mundane—comes from the Oral Torah. Obviously, the richness of the Oral Torah and its own development are dependent on the Written Torah. To fully blossom, the Oral Torah must be connected to the Written Torah so that they are as one. As is well known, "There is not a single word from the sages that is not alluded to in the [Written] Torah." If the oral tradition deviates in the smallest way from the Written Torah, it is no longer part of the Torah. This essential connection between the Oral Torah and the Written Torah is symbolized by the two days of Rosh Hashanah,<sup>8</sup> which even though they are two, are actually considered to be "one long day."<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, going back to our initial meditation on Moshe and Joshua coming together, we can now say that the two days of *Rosh Hashanah* symbolize each of their reigns. Both Moshe and Joshua are halachically considered kings, and of the sovereignty of kings the sages say: "One kingdom does not touch another kingdom, even as much as a hairbreadth." The song of *Ha'azinu* and hence *Rosh Hashanah* connect the kingship and leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, who gave the Written Torah, with the leadership of Joshua who was commanded to conquer the Land of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup>. *Sfat Emet Dvarim, Ha'azinu*, 5661.

<sup>2</sup>. Numbers 7:86.

<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, the text of the Ten Commandments in Exodus comprises exactly 620 letters. As explained by various commentaries, these 620 letters allude to the 613 commandments of the Torah together with either the 7 commandments added by the sages, or the 7 laws of *Bnei Noach*.

<sup>4</sup>. Jeremiah 23:29.

<sup>5</sup>. Joshua 1:8.

<sup>6</sup>. II Chronicles 20:9.

<sup>7</sup>. In the language of the Arizal's Kabbalah, on *Rosh Hashanah* the severing of the female aspect of reality from the male aspect (called the *nesirah*) occurs during the 10 days from the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* until *Yom Kipur*. But, the main part of the dissection takes place on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> days of this 10 day period.

<sup>8</sup>. Why *Rosh Hashanah* is two days is a longstanding question. One might think that *Rosh Hashanah* is two days long because it is also the *Rosh Chodesh* of the month of *Tishrei*. Indeed, sometimes, *Rosh Chodesh* is two days long, but in such a case it would span the 30<sup>th</sup> of the previous month and the 1<sup>st</sup> of the new month. But, *Rosh Hashanah* is the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of *Tishrei*.

<sup>9</sup>. The commentaries on the *Shulchan Aruch* explain that even in times when the Temple was standing and the consecration of the new moon was performed by the Sanhedrin, *Rosh Hashanah* was observed for two days, which together are known as "one long day" (*yoma arichta*, in Aramaic).