

# TIMELESS TORAH

## HAAZINU - Rock of Justice

### Rock of Justice

The song of Haazinu, although presented as a message of warning to the Jewish people before they entered Eretz Yisrael, contains a grand sweep of history - past, present and future - and is understood by the Sages to be an eternal and fundamental message to the Jewish people through the generations.

The verse that perhaps best captures the essence of Haazinu is one that is recited at a *levayah* and expresses the acceptance of Hashem's judgement: '*Hatzur tamim poalo ki kol derachav mishpat*' - The Rock, Whose work is perfect for all His ways are justice'. In this verse, Hashem is referred to as '*Tzur* - Rock', which is an appellation that occurs only three times in the rest of the Torah but no less than five times in Haazinu. Clearly, the Name *Tzur* describes Hashem's immutability and unchanging essence, but there is a deeper significance behind Moshe's use of this name in this context.

Rabbeinu Bechaye (d.1340) suggests that Moshe would sometimes reference a certain word to so-to-speak make up for what he perceived to be an area in which he had erred. Here, the use of this word evoked the most painful memory for Moshe Rabbeinu: his sin of hitting the rock and the devastating consequence of being forbidden entry into Eretz Yisrael. By using this particular Name of Hashem in this verse, Moshe was emphasising his praise for the ultimate justice of Hashem.

Another explanation of the word *Tzur* connects it to the word '*tzurah* - form'.

The Gemara (Berachot 10) graphically depicts the contrast between limited human ability and the infinite capabilities of Hashem. A human being, says the Gemara, can etch out the form of a person on a rock but cannot breathe into it a living spirit. Hashem, on the other hand, is '*tzar tzurah b'toch tzurah*' - designs a form within a form', creating life within mortal bodies.

It is this nuance found in the Name *Tzur* that underscores what is possibly the most fundamental aspect of our relationship with Hashem. The moving *piyyut* recited on Yom Kippur, *V'avita Tehillah* describes how Hashem prefers the praise of a human being over the praise of the *Malachim* (angels), despite their perfection. It is precisely the natural vulnerability of a human, whose soul is locked in a body of flesh and blood, that makes his or her growth and eventual recognition of the Divine so desirable to Hashem.

Thus, *Tzur* is a reference to Hashem's permanence and eternal strict justice. At the same time, though, this Name expresses our opportunity to reveal the infinite of Hashem's Existence in Creation, whereby even mortal beings can direct their souls towards spirituality and recognition of Hashem.

### Yashrut – The Hallmark of Creation

In the same verse, Moshe describes Hashem as '*tzaddik v'yashar*' - righteous and up-right'. According to the Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, d. 1893), the word *Yashar* has a specific nuance.



## Contemporary Perspectives on the Weekly Parsha with Rabbi Dr Yoni Birnbaum

Wednesdays - 8.00-8.45pm | In-person at Kinloss

He references several sources in the Gemara and in Neviim that, when talking about *Sefer Bereishit*, call it *Sefer HaYesharim* – The Book of the Upright. The Netziv explains, based on this verse from Parshat Haazinu, that the value of *yashrut* is distinct from the value of *tzidkut*. While *tzidkut* - righteousness - is a word that can be used to describe one who is pious and meticulous in his adherence to the mitzvot, a person who embodies these traits is not necessarily a *yashar*. For example, writes the Netziv, the generation of the Destruction of the Second Temple was characterised by great Torah scholars, who toiled in Torah and were exceptionally righteous. But this generation was also hallmarked by *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) which eventually brought about the destruction of the Temple. The Avot, by contrast, are the *yesharim* spoken about in *Sefer Bereishit*. From their conduct with people from other nations they encountered, we observe their truthfulness and their uprightness. This is *yashrut* - the deep honesty that is, in essence, a complete alignment with Creation itself.

### Envelope of Growth

*'Yimtza'eihu b'erez midbar ... yesovevenhu yevonenehu* – He found them in a wilderness ... He surrounded them, He gave them understanding' (32:10). This verse describes the love that Hashem had for the Jewish people in the desert, where He protected them and gave them the Torah. Seemingly, the particular 'surrounding' mentioned in the verse refers to the Clouds of Glory that enveloped the Jewish camp throughout their time in the Wilderness.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe (d.2005), however, explains this verse based on a teaching from the Gemara (Menachot 43b) that the Jewish people are cherished because Hashem has surrounded them with mitzvot; they have tefillin on their heads and arms, tzitzit on their garments and mezuzot on their doorways. Mitzvot, writes Rav Wolbe, are designed to elevate the external trappings of life, and in that way they build the internal aspects of a Jew. In his words, when we find an external frame, we can be sure there is something inside. So *yesovevenhu* means that we elevate everything that surrounds us, the way we live, by dedicating it to Hashem through our mitzvot. With that structure in place, we are able to develop the understanding that comes through the Torah itself.

Thus, the verse is teaching that when the Jewish people were in the Wilderness, deprived of their natural comforts, Hashem was able to find them, provide them with mitzvot and build them up in a positive way through the values of the Torah. This, of course, is the essence of the sukkah: like the Clouds of Glory, the sukkah envelops us and elevates us, encouraging us to leave behind the vanities and futilities that we have picked up over the past year and reset ourselves with the *simchah* of the Torah.

**The Timeless Torah weekly shiur will resume on Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, Parshat Noach**