

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## In Loving Memory of Shalom b' R' Yaacov Aryeh Minsky **PARSHAT HAAZINU**

### DVAR TORAH: TWO THINGS THAT HAPPEN EVERY SHEMITTAH

Hashem makes two things happen each Shemittah year, says the Sfas Emes (Parshat Behar 5648). He bases his approach on a close reading of the verses about Shemittah and statements by our Sages.

#### **1. The Gift of the Land**

God gave us the land of Israel as a gift. He chose to give it to the people of Israel because they will make it clear to the world that “la-Hashem haaretz,” the world is God’s. We will live on His land with the consciousness that we are merely “geirim vetoshavim” dwellers who recognize they are merely tenants on His land. This approach we learned from our forefather Avraham who, as the Midrash (Tanchuma Acharei Mot 9) says, received the entire world from God, but then gave it back to Him.

God did not only give us the land of Israel once. Rather, He gives it to us over and over again. The extra “and” of “Veyiten lecha ha-Elokim” – “And God will give you” is explained by our Sages (Breishit Rabbah 66:3) as “He gives and gives again.” This also is hinted at in a verse in Nechemiah (that we say during Pesukei Dezimra – Nechemiah 9:8, “Vecharot imo habrit”): “He made a covenant with him (Avraham) to give the land of the Canaanites ... to give to his descendants ...” The repetition of lateit, to give, teaches us that God gives and gives again.

That gift of the land is given to us every Shemittah. The parshah of Shemittah (Bamidbar 25:2) opens with: “When you enter the land that I am giving you – asher ani notein – the land should rest, a Shabbat for God.” The form of the verb notein indicates that God is, in the present, giving the land to the people. He did not just give it to them or to Avraham once in the past. The first thing that happens every Shemittah year is that God gives the land to the people of Israel as a gift.

#### **2. The Renewal of the World**

The Sfas Emes goes further, extrapolating from a comment by the Or Hachaim Hakadosh (Bereishit 2:2) about Shabbat. He tells us that just as on the very first Shabbat “vayinafash” – God put a soul, a nefesh, into the world; so on every Shabbat God renews the chiyut, the life energy of the world. Similarly, says the Sfas Emes, every Shemittah year the world is given renewed energy. The entire year is a Shabbat. The second thing that happens every Shemittah year is that God renews the life force of the world.

As the year 5775 begins, Shemittah begins. And as we turn to God hoping for the divine gift of a good and sweet year, Shemittah reminds us that we receive gifts from God and give them right back to Him. Avraham was given the world, but gave it right back to God, the “Koneih Shamayim Vaaretz” the One Who Owns the Heavens and Earth – recognizing God’s ownership over all of existence and dedicating it all to Him. Israel receives the land as a gift every Shemittah and right away declares “La-Hashem haaretz,” the land is God’s and we don’t exhibit personal ownership – its fruits are hefker, open to all. Each individual must also dedicate all the Divine gifts he receives back to God – acknowledging that all of our blessing is from Him and using what we receive to serve Him. May we all be blessed with a good and sweet year, and a ketivah vachatimah tovah.

## SOURCE GUIDE: THE LAST VERSE OF THE HAFTARAH

The last line of the Haftarah of the second day of Rosh Hashanah (Yirmiyahu 31:1-19) is, according to the Gemara (Megillah 31a), the main reason why Chazal chose that section. Rashi and the Ran explain why (that sentence has also been set to music and made it into the Musaf for Rosh Hashanah):

<p><b>Megillah 31a and Rashi's and the Ran's Comments</b></p> <p>On Rosh Hashanah we read, "In the seventh month" (Bamidbar 29:1-6) and the Haftarah is "Is my precious son Efraim ..." (Yirmiyahu 31:1-19). And there are those that say [the Torah reading is] "God remembered Sarah ..." (Bereishit 21) and the Haftarah is [the story of] Chanah (Shmuel I 1:1 – 2:10). And nowadays that we have two days: the first day we follow the second opinion above ("there are those that say ...") and the second day we read "God tested Avraham" (Bereishit 22:1-24, the story of the Akeidah), and the Haftarah is "Is my precious son ...."</p> <p><b>Rashi:</b> The reason to read "Is my precious son Efraim" as the Haftarah is because of the words "I will surely remember and surely have mercy" (in the last verse of the Haftarah).</p> <p><b>Ran:</b> ... Because the obligation of the day (Rosh Hashanah) is to mention remembrances, and it is written "I will surely remember."</p>	<p><b>מגילה לא. ורש"י ור"ן שם</b>  בראש השנה בחדש השביעי  ומפטירין הבן יקיר לי אפרים  ויש אומרים וה' פקד את  שרה ומפטירין בחנה  והאידנא דאיכא תרי יומי  יומא קמא כיש אומרים  למחר והאלהים נסה את  אברהם ומפטירין הבן יקיר:</p> <p><b>רש"י</b>  הבן יקיר לי אפרים - משום  זכור אזכרנו רחם ארחמנו:</p> <p><b>ר"ן (י: בדפי הרי"ף)</b>  ומפטירין הבן יקיר לי אפרים  — מפני שחובת היום להזכיר  זכרונות וכתוב זכור אזכרנו:</p>
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According to Rashi and the Ran (quoted by the Beit Yosef Orach Chaim 601) the focus is on the last verse of the Haftarah. To properly appreciate the Haftarah, then, we should ask two questions:

What is the meaning and message of that last verse (31:19)? How do the 18 verses leading up to it shed light on the last verse?

**The Background: Verses 1-13:** The first thirteen verses of the Haftarah speak glowingly about the future redemption, the return to the land and its rebuilding, then of its blessing and abundance. Israel's mourning will be replaced with joy and dancing.

**Verses 14-16:** The scene then shifts. In the first 13 verses of the Haftarah we watched the exiles returning to the land of Israel down here on earth. Verse 14 now goes up on high (*ramah* – though there are those that explain this as referring to the place Ramah in Binyamin, Targum Yonatan says it is berum alma, in the world above) to the crying of Rachel over her children:

<p><b>Yirmiyahu 31:14-16</b></p> <p>14 Thus says Hashem: A voice is heard on high, wailing, bitter crying. It is Rachel crying over her children. She refuses to be consoled over her children, for they are not.</p> <p>15 Thus says Hashem: Hold back your voice from crying and your eyes from tears. For there is reward for your deed, says God, and they will return from the land of the enemy. 16 And there is hope for your end, says God, and your children will return to their borders.</p>	<p><b>ירמיה לא:יד-טז</b>  יד פה אמר ה' קול ברמה נשמע  נהי בכי תמרורים רחל מבכה על  בניה מאנה להנחם על בניה כי  איננו: טז פה אמר ה' מנעי קולך  מבכי ועיניך מדמעה כי יש שכר  לפעלתך נאם ה' ושבנו מארץ  אויב: טז ויש תקוה לאתרתך  נאם ה' ושבנו בנים לגבולם:</p>
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**Verses 17-18:** Once again, there is hope – that Rachel’s crying will be able to stop. But then we reach the final stage of the Haftarah, and the final challenge – will Ephraim succeed in repenting? [Ephraim might refer to the tribe of Ephraim, the leader of the ten tribes (see Radak) or, perhaps, all of Israel (see Targum Yonatan).] Will it happen? In verse 17 Ephraim cries out to God, “*Hashiveini ve’ashuvah*,” “Bring me back and I will repent.” In verse 18 Ephraim repents: After I repented and changed my ways I regret and am ashamed of my past.

**Verse 19:** Now, after the teshuvah of Ephraim, comes the last verse of the Haftarah (the following explanation relies heavily on Abarbanel):

**Yirmiyahu 31: 19**

Because his repentance is so complete, God now says to Ephraim-Israel: הֲבֵן יָקִיר לִי אֶפְרַיִם אִם יָלֵד שְׂעִיטָעִים – [Note that the vowel under the hei is a chataf patach הֵ – indicating that Hashem (the speaker in the verse) is asking a question] “Isn’t Ephraim an honored and precious son? Isn’t he a beloved play child? (see Daat Mikra who notes the parallel to the rhetorical question in Bereishit 17:17). כִּי מִדֵּי דַבְרֵי בּוֹ זָכַר אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד – For whenever I speak of him this is what I will constantly remember him as – Ephraim the honorable and adored. וְעַל כֵּן הִמּוֹ מְעִי לוֹ – Therefore I am emotionally drawn to him (literally, my insides are aroused towards him) and אֶרְחַמֶנּוּ בְּיָמֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה – I will certainly have mercy upon him through the final redemption, says Hashem.

**“Ben Yakir” vs. “Yeled Shaashuim”:** The Malbim and others develop the distinction between these two expressions: Ephraim-Israel as the young playful child as they left Egypt and God loved them in their infant stage; and as the “ben yakir”, the mature, distinguished, honorable, and adored son (the modern title “Yakir Yerushalayim”, given to distinguished and accomplished citizens of Jerusalem, is used as in our verse), as Ephraim-Israel after it finally repents in the end of days.

**“Ki Midei Dabri Bo Zachor Ezkerenu Od”:** This verse was the main inspiration for choosing this as the Haftarah of Rosh Hashanah, for Israel is here positively remembered by God. It is therefore also one of the closing verses of the Zichronot section of Musaf on Rosh Hashanah. An additional point - One translation of the word “bo” is “about him” – whenever I speak about him, says God. But Rashi brings a second explanation: “bo” means “through him” – whenever My words of Torah are expressed through him (God speaks through the one who is learning Torah) I will be inspired to remember him positively. This is also appropriate on Rosh Hashanah as a day reminiscent of the day the Torah was given (the Shofar was blown at Mount Sinai, and God’s *Malchut*, Kingship, was expressed).

## EVERYONE LOVES DEW BY RABBI YISROEL CHOLEVA

In this week’s parshah, Ha’azinu, we find that the Torah is compared to two things: rain and dew, as it is written “My lesson will drip like rain; my word will flow like dew” (Devarim 32:2). On this verse, Rashi quotes the Sifri which says that the Torah is compared to dew because everyone rejoices over it like dew. This is in contrast to rain which gets a mixed reaction: travellers, as well as those who have left their pressed grapes outside, are saddened as the rain spoils their travels and their wine. The obvious question here is that the same verse also compares the Torah to rain! Why would the Torah be compared to rain in such a seemingly negative context? It would have made more sense for the Torah to be compared just to dew and leave out the rain.

The Ktav Sofer (Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer: Hungary, 19<sup>th</sup> Century) explains as follows. The fundamental difference between rain and dew is the way in which it is formed. Rain, although it falls from the sky, begins its water cycle from the ground, evaporating and forming clouds, and only afterwards falls back down. Dew, however, is not the result of clouds, but rather the moisture that is contained in the atmosphere. It is therefore not classified as precipitation since it does not fall from the sky.

We find similarly that there are two approaches to acquiring Torah knowledge. The first is described by the adage “Only if one claims that they expended effort and achieved knowledge of Torah, are they to be believed” (Megillah 6b). That is, Torah knowledge gained by toiling to understand, setting aside times for study, seeking out guidance from Rabbis, and striving to come to clarity; in short human endeavour. The second approach is “to acquire Torah requires *siyata d’shmaya* (Divine assistance)” (also Megillah 6b). Our actions are not able or sufficient to filter the infinite Torah into our finite minds and therefore we are infused with Torah only due to the benevolence of our Creator. In other words, there is an acquisition of Torah that comes as a direct result of our effort, and there is another acquisition of Torah that is a gift from Hashem. These two approaches are each compared to either rain or dew. Just as the rain begins by rising from the earth and only afterwards falling back down, so too there is a level of Torah which we acquire due to our own efforts in reaching Heavenwards, and is dependent on the amount that we are willing to invest. However, there is another access to Torah, and that is compared to dew; a blessing from Hashem that is independent and disproportional to the amount that we invest. The gates of Heaven open and pour out their blessing, not just as a reaction to our deeds, but as a Divine gift.

We are left with the question as to why Rashi describes the rain as receiving a mixed reaction. If we are comparing the rain to Torah acquired from our own efforts, why would that be viewed as anything other than positive?

I would like to suggest the following answer. If one understands that they are being rewarded according to their investment, they feel as if they are entitled to their reward. The arrangement appears to work the same way as an automated system: just as in a science experiment if you put together the right materials at the correct ratios the result is guaranteed, so too if we put in X amount of effort into Torah we will consequentially receive Y as a reward. The main component missing in this formula is the relationship with Hashem! The world is not just a complicated series of actions and reactions, but rather is controlled and directed by the Master of the Universe! It is to Him that we seek to build a connection through the Torah and by ignoring this aspect we are nullifying the entire purpose of what we are trying to achieve.

When one receives a divine gift from Hashem, they are immediately grateful for whatever they have been given. That feeling of gratitude per force translates into a development of the relationship between the giver and recipient; between G-d and man. Like the dew, whose source is not visible to the eye, the *siyata d’shmaya* is provided without a recognizable source or reason. It is an expression of the deep bond between Hashem and His creations and it emphasizes the point that the focus in the world is the relationship, a living and active link to the Divine. In this way we can see why it is preferable for the Torah to be given in the way of the dew as opposed to the way of the rain.

The Gemara teaches us that in the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur Hashem is particularly close to us. We should take advantage of these days to do teshuvah, to put in the effort to further our Torah study and also to be open to the greater opportunity for a deeper relationship with our Creator that this auspicious time presents.

## In Loving Memory of Shalom b' R' Yaacov Aryeh Minsky

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*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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