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Wishing our Torah Sparks community a happy, healthy and sweet New Year!

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The weekly Haftarah Commentary
By Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Senior CY Faculty in Talmud and Midrash,
may be found at: <http://www.uscj.org.il/learn/commentaries/>

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TORAH SPARKS

Rosh Hashana 5778

Parashat Ha'azinu

Shabbat Shuvah

September 22-23, 2017 • 3 Tishrei 5778

Annual (Deuteronomy 32:1-52): Etz Hayim p. 1185-1195; Hertz p. 896-903

Triennial (Deuteronomy 32:1-52): Etz Hayim p. 1185-1195; Hertz p. 896-903

Haftarah (Hosea 14:2-10; Joel 2:15-27): Etz Hayim p. 1234-1238;

Hertz p. 891-895

The Inevitable Decree and Learning to Say Goodbye

Rabbi Arie Hasit, a CY alum and frequent visitor, is the leader of the Minyan Shivioni in Mazkeret Batya.

Parashat *Ha'azinu*, read this year between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, is the last parashah that we read on Shabbat before completing and restarting the cycle on Simchat Torah. As such, even though it does not end the Torah, it is still a climax in the communal experience of reading and grappling with the text on a weekly basis. The last verse, the one with which we end our Shabbat readings for the year, describes what must surely be the great disappointment of Moses's life. As he stands on Mount Nebo, across from Israel, God first tells Moses that he will die on that day, and then says to him, "You may view the land from

a distance, but you shall not enter it—the land that I am giving to the Israelite people” (Deut: 32:52).

Read at a time in which we regularly pray to be written in the Book of Life, the message that ends our parashah is a scary one. Moses has lived a long and fulfilling life—from leading the people out of Egypt to personally speaking to God and receiving the Torah—but he is denied the ultimate prize out of punishment for one sin. One action taken by Moses, in a moment of anger and frustration, and there is no opportunity for repentance. Instead he must accept that he can see his people led into Israel, but he cannot join them there.

Rabbi Bradley Artson, Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, reflects on this last moment in Moses’s life in his book, *The Everyday Torah*. There he writes, “Moses resembles each of us—always on the way, never able to reach the final destination, but blessed with the vision to see what we cannot attain ourselves...The ultimate goal is one that we cannot attain as individuals but is a gift to the ages—to our children and to all children.” Read this way, Moses’s death is not a punishment at all, but rather he lives to see his leadership come to fruition and lives to see the next generation take on the mantle of all that he taught them.

As our High Holiday liturgy focuses on life and death, we have a need to understand how to make meaning of difficult, fatalistic passages. When we sing the haunting “*U’ntaneh Tokef*,” asking who will live and who will die, and for the latter, in what horrible ways, how do we make sense of the knowledge that good people will leave us in the coming year? The end of *Ha’azinu* gives us a clue. Death is not to be seen as a punishment, for it is the very thing that makes us human. Even Moses, as great and important as he is, cannot live forever. Our prayer instead reminds us of how fleeting life can be and how unexpectedly it could end. In that moment, we are challenged first to think about how we will make the most of every minute we have with the people whom we love. Yet as we inevitably think about the people we have lost, we have an opportunity to remember not what could have been but what was—how those people shaped us to be who we are, how they led us to a promised land that they could not enter. We cannot go back and bring them with us, but we can live the lives they inspired us to live as their memory accompanies us always.

A Vort for Parashat Ha’azinu Shabbat Shuvah Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Editor, Torah Sparks

Ha’azinu shamayim/Listen, O heavens ...*v’tishma ha’aretz*/Hear, O earth” (Deut 32:1). The *Toras Moshe* (R’ Moses Schreiber/Sofer a/k/a The *Chatam Sofer*, leading European Orthodox rabbi, 1762–1839) said that *shamayim* here refers to the high level of the Jewish community; *aretz* to the lower classes, the simple people preoccupied with day-to-day earthly matters. Moses addresses the leadership first because there is a dynamic in communal behavior. If the leaders pay attention to Torah and *mitzvot*, the rest of the community will do the same. If the important people are indifferent, the masses will follow quickly and willingly. What was true then is true today, in big communities and in small institutions, like synagogues.

Table Talk

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

As Rosh Hashana takes place right before Shabbat, some of the questions in this week’s Table Talk are about the readings of the 2 days of Rosh Hashana.

- 1) On the first day of Rosh Hashana we read (Bereshit 21) about the birth of Yitzchak (Isaac). Why was this theme chosen for Rosh Hashana? Why do you think that this particular birth story was chosen?
- 2) On that day we read as the Haftara the story of Samuel’s birth (I Sam 1:1-2:10). What elements of the story are similar to that of the Torah reading? What does that story add to our understanding of Yitzchak’s birth?
- 3) On the second day of Rosh Hashana we read (bereshit 22) about Akedat Yitzchak (the binding of Isaac). How is this connected to Rosh Hashana? How is it connected to the theme of the first day? What light does it add to that theme?

And a little Parashat Hashavua – Haazinu:

- 4) This powerful poem explains several things that the people of Israel need to know. 32:39 is such a section. What does God explain about Himself? Why might these dual abilities be confusing (this was a polytheistic world)?