

Biblical Commentators

Baal HaTurim

by Rabbi David Lister, Edgware United Synagogue

You are standing today before the Lord your G-d - your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel.

Your children, your wives and your converts...
(Devarim 29:9-10)

It is normal to see these two verses as two separate entities, but Baal HaTurim focuses on the juxtaposition of the end of one verse with the beginning of the next: "all the men of Israel, the children", implying that there is a connection between the body politic of the Jewish people and little children.

Baal HaTurim explains that this means that the leaders of the Jewish people are to view the people with as much love, devotion and patience as if their communities were their own children. Most people do not see their children as enemies. Even when a child misbehaves and parents must behave sternly, they do so with heavy hearts and take no pleasure in breaking their child's defiance or denying a request which is improper. Ultimately, the parents want nothing from the child but that the child should do the

right thing and lead a happy and fulfilled life.

The Jewish leadership ethos is spelled out more fully by Maimonides in his exposition of the laws associated with a Jewish king:

Just as Scripture stipulates great honour to be paid to the king, so he should... be gracious and merciful to small and great alike. He should devote his time to what is good for them and what they want, and he should care for the honour of the most insignificant among them. He should speak gently to the people, and always conduct himself with great humility.

He should be patient with their troublesome behaviour, their burdensomeness, their complaints and their resentment, like a carer carrying a suckling.
(Mishneh Torah, Melachim 2:6)

It is in this spirit that the leaders of the Jewish people can bring their precious charges into the covenant of G-d, as the next verse (29:11) continues:

... to make you pass into G-d's covenant ... that He might make you today into His people.



The Song of Torah

by Rabbi Yisroel Fine

Cockfosters & N Southgate United Synagogue

"And now write for yourselves this song."
(Devarim 31:19)

This injunction of Moses, coming just before the sidra of Ha'azinu, could be justifiably construed as referring to Moses' poetic song contained in that sidra. Not so, says Maimonides. Following a comment in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 21b) he interprets this verse as a positive command to every Jew to write a Sefer Torah for himself, ie "write for yourself a Sefer Torah which contains *shira* – an element of song".

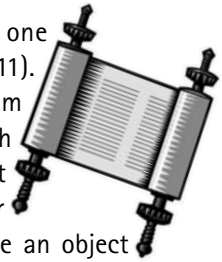
Maimonides' sensitivity to allowing Moses to describe the Torah as a book of song, rather than a book which contains an element of song, is well-founded. Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein, in his *Tosefet Brachah*, points to Rava's statement (Sotah 35a) that King David was punished for trivialising the Torah as mere song when he said "your statutes have been my songs" (Psalm 119).

However, if 'song' is an ill-fitting description of the Almighty's legislation for mankind, it nevertheless may be remarkably apposite in describing the manner of its interpretation and the dynamics of Jewish learning.

Diverse views of interpretation are graphically portrayed by King Solomon as "the words of the masters of assemblies,

which are given from one shepherd" (Kohelet 12:11). Scholars may emerge from the assemblies of Torah study with different pronouncements on their lips. Some may pronounce an object pure – others impure; some may permit, others prohibit. But all announce the words of the one Shepherd. All views have their legitimate place and integrity in their appropriate settings and conditions. In the words of our Sages "both these and these are the words of the living G-d" (Eruvin 13b).

Ultimately, however, the song of Torah is the sound that emanates when two minds engage with each other in attempting to unravel the mystery of the word of G-d. The dynamic of Jewish learning flourishes solely through the 'battleground of Torah' – the cut and thrust of provocative debate and stimulating argument. Is it not on the fertile soil of challenging debate that the fruits of truth are nurtured? The cacophony of the Bet Hamidrash is none other than the orchestral sound of Jewish life, each instrument playing its part in creating an inspirational work. The Bet Hamidrash becomes the concert arena of Jewish life, resonating to the sublime symphony of Torah learning.



Teshuvah

by Rabbi Phillip Ginsbury

Today's Torah reading contains some stark reminders of the follies of disobedience to the Torah but it also contains a profoundly hopeful and positive message. This short passage is known as *Parashat ha-Teshuvah* - the section on repentance (Devarim 20, 1-10) - and within its ten verses we find the root of the word *teshuvah* used no less than six times.

For the Rambam, the very existence of the concept of teshuvah, the magnetic pull exerted on every Jew at this time of the year to indulge in spiritual stock-taking and self-improvement, is the clearest proof for the existence of free will.

A great modern Jewish thinker and scholar, Rav Joseph Soloveitchik z'l, has written movingly of the anxieties of the Jewish people on both an individual and communal level, the feelings of alienation to which modern society is so prone. For him, teshuvah provides an answer to this in the following way.

Although we translate the word teshuvah as repentance, we are aware that it really means "returning". Rav Soloveitchik translates it as "circular motion". If we stand on the edge of a large circle and walk round its circumference, it sometimes seems as if the starting point is getting further and further away but, in reality, it is getting closer and closer all the time. On Rosh Hashanah, the new year begins and from then on each day

we get further and further away from our starting point - Rosh Hashanah. But each day is also part of a return - a coming closer to the completion of the year's cycle - to Rosh Hashanah of the next year.

He illustrates this from Chapter 7 of the first book of Samuel. There we are told that Samuel was a circuit judge, judging Israel throughout his life. He would take a circular route each year through the main cities of Israel and deal with cases that awaited him there, but he always came back to Ramah in the end, because that was where he lived. As soon as he'd left his home town with the intention of visiting other cities, he was always heading for home. For this was where his roots were, from which all his powers of judgement and spiritual strength were derived.

This is the secret of *teshuvah*, and the reason for the mass return on Rosh Hashanah. No Jew can totally separate himself from G-d nor can the Jewish people travel in a straight line away from Him. We are always on the path of return on the circular route of teshuvah. Sometimes the journey is long, sometimes the circle is very large - an outer rather than an inner circle - but in the end, the Jew returns, to the Synagogue, to Jewish life and identity, because that is his home, that is the place of security and friendship, a true homecoming, where he is assured of a warm welcome.

The sidrot of Nitzavim, Vayelech and Haazinu

by Dr Lionel Kopelowitz, Past President Board of Deputies

These three sidrot are read on the last two or three Shabbatot of the annual cycle. They are read separately if there is a Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Succot. When Rosh Hashanah falls on a Thursday or Shabbat, there is no Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Succot and as a consequence, the sidrot of Nitzavim and Vayelech are read together.

THE HAFTAROT

The haftarah for Nitzavim or Nitzavim-Vayelech is always that of Nitzavim and is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah.

The Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known as Shabbat Shuva, and problems arise as to which is the correct haftarah to read.

Hertz, Soncino and Artscroll all give as the haftarah Hosea 14: 2-12, Micah 7:18-20 and Joel 2:15-27. But it is interesting to examine the original Hertz Chumash for Devarim produced as a single volume in 1936, one year before the composite volume. Hertz rules in that volume that if

Vayelech is Shabbat Shuvah, the haftarah is Hosea and Micah, whereas when Haazinu is the sidra for Shabbat Shuva, the haftarah is Hosea and Joel. The large, red haftarah book follows the original instruction of Hertz, citing the Noda B'Yehuda of Prague. Hertz does not repeat this instruction in the composite volume, which, as stated above,

gives all three passages as the haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah, irrespective of the sidra. This is the custom in our synagogues.

It is interesting to note that the Silbermann Chumash with Rashi claims that our minhag is in fact that of Sephardim and of Frankfurt-on-the-Main. He says that

the custom for Ashkenazim is to read Isaiah 55:6-56:8 (*Dirshu*). This is normally read on the afternoons of fast days. I have never found any Ashkenazi synagogue which follows that practice.

When Haazinu is read on the Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Succot, the haftarah is always II Samuel 22.



United Synagogue Daf Hashavua Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue **Editor:** Rabbi Baruch Davis

Editorial Board:

Rabbi Yisroel Fine Rabbi Emanuel Levy Rabbi David Lister Richard Marcus Rabbi David Mason Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Available also via email. US website www.theus.org.uk ©United Synagogue

To sponsor Daf Hashavua please contact Richard Marcus on 020 8343 5658, or rmarcus@theus.org.uk

If you have any comments or questions regarding Daf Hashavua please email rabbidavis@theus.org.uk