YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**Parashat Ha’azinu**

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

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Dedicated by Steven Weiner & Lisa Wise in tribute to
Mr. Yechiel Saiman of blessed memory. His presence in our community was such a privilege and treat for us, and he is very deeply missed.  We send our warmest wishes of comfort to his wife Chana and to all of their children and grandchildren.

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**Repentance in *Parashat Ha’azinu***

Summarized by Binyamin Frankel

Translated by David Strauss

The *gemara* in *Avoda Zara* relates:

They then brought up R. Chanina ben Teradyon and asked him, “Why have you occupied yourself with the Torah?” He replied, “Thus the Lord my God commanded me.” At once they sentenced him to be burned, his wife to be slain, and his daughter to be consigned to a brothel. (*Avoda Zara* 17a)

The *gemara* then explains the reason for the various punishments:

The punishment of being burned came upon him because he pronounced the Name in its full spelling in public… His wife was punished by being slain, because she did not prevent him [from doing it]… His daughter was consigned to a brothel, for R. Yochanan related that once that daughter of his was walking in front of some great men of Rome who remarked, “How beautiful are the steps of this maiden!” Whereupon she took particular care of her step.

And the *gemara* describes the punishment:

As the three of them went out [from the tribunal], they declared their submission to [the Divine] righteous judgment. He said: "The Rock, His work is perfect; for all his ways are justice" (*Devarim* 32:4). His wife said: "A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He" (ibid.). And the daughter said: "Great in counsel and mighty in work, whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doing" (*Yirmeyahu* 32:19). Rabbi [Yehuda Ha-Nasi] said: How great were these righteous ones, in that the three Scriptural passages, expressing submission to Divine justice, readily occurred to them just at the appropriate time for the declaration of such submission.

Our Rabbis taught: When R. Yose ben Kisma was ill, R. Chanina ben Teradyon went to visit him. He said to him, “Brother Chanina, know you not that it is Heaven that has ordained this [Roman] nation to reign? For though she laid waste His House, burnt His Temple, slew His pious ones and caused His best ones to perish, still is she firmly established! Yet I have heard about you that you sit and occupy yourself with the Torah, publicly gather assemblies, and keep a scroll [of the Law] in your bosom!” He replied, “Heaven will show mercy.” He said to him, “I am telling you plain facts, and you say: Heaven will show mercy! It will surprise me if they do not burn both you and the scroll of the Law with fire”… It was said that within but a few days R. Yose ben Kisma died and all the great men of Rome went to his burial and made great lamentation for him. On their return, they found R. Chanina ben Teradyon sitting and occupying himself with the Torah, publicly gathering assemblies, and keeping a scroll of the Law in his bosom. Straightaway they took hold of him, wrapped him in the Scroll of the Law, placed bundles of branches round him, and set them on fire. They then brought tufts of wool, which they had soaked in water, and placed them over his heart, so that he should not expire quickly…

The executioner then said to him, “Rabbi, if I raise the flame and take away the tufts of wool from over your heart, will you cause me to enter into the life to come?” He said to him, “Yes.” [He said,] “Then swear to me.” He swore to him. He thereupon raised the flame and removed the tufts of wool from over his heart, and his soul departed speedily. The executioner then jumped and threw himself into the fire. A heavenly voice issued forth: “R. Chanina ben Teradyon and the executioner have been assigned to the World to Come. When Rabbi [Yehuda Ha-Nasi] heard it, he wept and said, “One may acquire eternal life in a single hour, another after many years.”

R. Chanina ben Teradyon entered the historical pantheon of those who sanctified God's name, and he is mentioned alongside the great men of Israel, like R. Akiva and the rest of the martyrs. What is the significance of "pronouncing God's name in its full spelling in public," that it justified taking such a great risk? Why did R. Chanina ben Teradyon not choose to act in the manner of R. Yose ben Kisma, so as not to be harmed, all the more so in light of R. Yose's justification of his approach, that "it is Heaven that has ordained this nation [Rome] to reign"?

It seems that R. Chanina chooses to adopt the declared position of revealing God's glory in the world. The verse that he cites to declare his submission to God's judgment, "The Rock, His work is perfect," is a precise continuation of his action. Thus we find in our *parasha*, *Parashat Ha'azinu*:

For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe you greatness to our God. The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He. (*Devarim* 32:3-4)

R. Chanina proclaims God's name and is not afraid of putting himself at risk in order to achieve that aim. His proclamation inspires us to take a closer look at *Parashat Ha'azinu*, in order to reach a deeper understanding of the motives for his action.

**Repentance in *Parashat Nitzavim* vs. Repentance in *Parashat Ha’azinu***

On the face of it, the Torah could have drawn to a close at the end of *Parashat Nitzavim*, which concludes in an impressive manner:

See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil, in that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances; then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God shall bless you in the land where you go in to possess it. But if your heart turn away, and you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I declare to you this day that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days upon the land, where you pass over the Jordan to go in to possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore, choose life, that you may live, you and your seed; to love the Lord your God, to hearken to His voice, and to cleave to Him; for that is your life and the length of your days; that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov, to give them. (*Devarim* 30:15-20)

*Parashat Vezot Ha-Beracha* can be seen as an appendix to the book of *Devarim*. But why does Moshe continue to *Parashot Vayelekh* and *Ha'azinu*, seeing that they speak of an entirely different type of repentance? *Parashat Nitzavim* allows the people of Israel to repent after sinning and being punished. The people sin, they are severely punished, they understand the seriousness of their actions, and they return to God. On the other hand, *Parashat Vayelekh* and the Song of *Ha'azinu* relate to the people of Israel strictly as an "object." God does not help the people of Israel due to their repentance, but only due to the long-term reckoning that He has with the gentile nations.

In *Parashat Vayelekh*,there is only a kind of warning that God will say in the future, "I told you so":

For I know that after my death you will deal corruptly and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the end of days; because you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him through the work of your hands. (*Devarim* 31:29)

Punishment is described here, without any process of repentance. The Song of *Ha'azinu* offers a similar account, and continues:

But Yeshurun waxed fat and kicked; you did wax fat, you did grow thick, you did become gross, and he forsook God who made him, and contemned the Rock of his salvation. They roused Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations did they provoke Him. They sacrificed to demons, no-gods, gods that they knew not, new gods that came up of late, which your fathers dreaded not. Of the Rock that begot you, you were unmindful, and did forget God that bore you. And the Lord saw and spurned, because of the provoking of His sons and His daughters. And He said: I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very obstinate generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. They have roused Me to jealousy with a no-god; they have provoked Me with their vanities; and I will rouse them to jealousy with a no-people; I will provoke them with a vile nation… For I lift up My hand to heaven, and say: As I live forever, If I whet My glittering sword, and My hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to My adversaries, and will recompense them that hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword shall devour flesh; with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the long-haired heads of the enemy. Sing aloud, O you nations, of His people; for He does avenge the blood of His servants, and does render vengeance to His adversaries, and does make expiation for the land of His people. (*Devarim* 32:15-20, 40-43)

God renders vengeance to the nations not because of the repentance of the people of Israel, which is not even mentioned in the song, but only because of His desire to harm the offending nations.

**Repentance after the Fact**

What is happening today? In our current culture, we are familiar with only one form of payment: If a person wishes to receive something, he must first pay for it. Whether we are dealing with an opera, a movie, or a soccer match, one arrives before the event, pays at the box office, and enters the event. Is it conceivable that a person should enter the event freely and that after the experience he should wait in a long line at the checkout to pay?

But this is, in fact, the repentance of *Parashat Ha'azinu.* Whereas *Parashat Nitzavim* describes classic repentance – sin and punishment followed by repentance, which aims to end the punishment and the suffering – *Parashat Ha'azinu* describes a different type of repentance: sin and punishment followed by a display of God's mercy for other reasons, only afterwards followed by the people of Israel’s repentance.

That repentance does not actually appear in the verses of the Song of *Ha'azinu*. It is like the eight verses that were written by Yehoshua. Moshe, as it were, leaves us with a Torah that is missing several verses. This is that same Moshe, the greatest of prophets, who was overshadowed by only one figure – the whole people of Israel. The people of Israel are given the task of completing the eight verses. Yehoshua did this in the generation after Moshe, and sometimes history demands that the people of Israel write their own eight verses – not in every generation, but certainly in our generation of redemption.

R. Chanina ben Teradyon understands that he must write the eight verses of his generation, and he therefore lunges forward heedless of danger, standing alone before the entire empire of Rome. He does not choose the path of R. Yose ben Kisma, but rather clings to the Torah and to the public dissemination of the word of God and the name of God.

In our own generation, we must take responsibility and "pay," as it were, for God's kindness. A few weeks ago [i.e., in 2014], it became clear that on this Rosh Hashana, we were supposed to be under murderous attack. The Hamas tunnels that were destroyed in Operation Tzuk Eitan were intended for the infiltration of terrorist squads that would carry out massacres in settlements near the perimeter fence surrounding the Gaza Strip. Missiles were supposed to land on the State of Israel by surprise.

And here, Rosh Hashana and Shabbat Shuva have passed, and we feel safe. God rendered vengeance to our enemy, and the plan was exposed even before they were to be punished. Now it is our turn to pay, to spread the word of God in public as a kind of payback for the kindness of God revealed before our very eyes.

[This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Ha'azinu*, 5765 (2014).]