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**RABBI WEIN'S
WEEKLY
BLOG**



HAAZINU

There are two approaches to understanding much of the prophecy contained in the grand poem of Moshe that constitutes this week's Torah reading. Rashi in fact develops both themes thoroughly in his commentary. One view is that the Jewish people and their future are the subjects of Moshe's Divine words.

The difficulties and challenges raised in the verses of this Torah reading are those that the Jewish nation and society will have to overcome in their historic and unprecedented journey in the story of human civilization. Because of the nature of our existence in the world, the Jews are naturally fixated upon their own story and its events, both past and present.

The old maxim that all events and world leaders must be viewed through the lens of, "Is this good for the Jews?" has a great deal of truth attached to it. A basic necessity of Jewish life is knowledge and understanding of our history and our central place in the story of the human race. It is difficult, if not

almost impossible, to be a staunch Jew without such knowledge and an identity of individual and national self.

So, the prophecy and vision expressed in the Torah reading must perforce certainly be addressed to the Jewish nation. And that perhaps is one of the main reasons that these written words of the Torah were memorized by generations of Jewish schoolchildren throughout the ages. The message was simply too precious and vital for it somehow to be allowed to be ignored or forgotten.

The alternate interpretation of the prophecy contained in this week's Torah reading is that these words and events refer not to the Jewish people exclusively but rather to the nations of the world generally. As such, all of the strife and violence that so characterizes the human condition will have to be experienced before the world generally comes to its senses and creates a more just and serene society.

The Jewish people will not be passive observers in this process, for they will be greatly affected by the general society as well. But, the heavy lifting, so to speak, is a universal challenge and problem and not an exclusively Jewish issue. This view is certainly reflected in the words and ideas of the Rosh HaShana prayers, which speak of a

universal recognition of the Creator of all and an acceptance of the sovereignty of Heaven.

Jews often feel isolated and even insulated from general world events that surround them. But that is a very dangerous illusion to hold. Though in many ways separated from the world, because of our faith and the demands of our Torah, we are nevertheless part of that universal world.

The balancing act of Jews has always been their attempt to be part of the general society without compromising their uniqueness, faith and Torah observances. That is an important task that the prophetic poem of Haazinu sets before us.

SUKKOT

All of us sense a feeling of spiritual deflation immediately after the exalted atmosphere of Yom Kippur. To have to plunge immediately and directly into the icy waters of everyday life is much too challenging a task. We have just been given an entire day to nurture our souls and to exist as angels without the necessity of fulfilling the requirements of our bodies. So the Lord, so to speak, allows us a more gradual descent into our physical, everyday

lives. We are asked to forego the comforts and solidness of our homes for a period of time, to dwell in a succah, exposed to the heavens and to the natural world.

It is again, like Yom Kippur itself, a place of the soul and not of the body. For the succah, no matter how elaborate and luxurious we attempt to make it, remains a temporary and exposed environment. The body is aware of this situation and is somewhat discomforted by it. The soul revels in it. Thus the soul hangs on to the last vestiges of Yom Kippur through Hoshana Rabba, before our bodies return to complete dominion over our lives.

Perhaps that is also one of the reasons that the day of Hoshana Rabba is considered as being a High Holy Day and not only as an intermediate day of Sukkot. Though none of the restrictions of Yom Kippur are present on that festival day or throughout any of the joyous days of Sukkot, the spiritual atmosphere of Yom Kippur is still present, for we are living amongst holy clouds and not in physically strong structures.

Jews the world over are willing to spend sizeable amounts of money in the fulfillment of the commandments of the holiday of Sukkot. We are all aware that the price of a lemon or of an orange or any citrus fruit at the local green grocer is

rather negligible. Not so the price of an Etrog! It is not the fruit itself that makes it so valuable to so many. It is the ability to fulfill the will of God through an etrog – itself a gift of God's bounty – that makes it so valuable... as to be almost priceless.

All of the physical instruments that we use throughout our lives are the means through which our souls remain connected to our Creator. Just as the value of an etrog lies in what lies behind the etrog – in what it represents and Who ordained its use on the holiday of Sukkot, would that we would view everything in life, all of our goods and possessions, friends and families and our society generally, with such a perspective.

In essence that is the basis of Jewish thought and the moral code of the Torah. On Yom Kippur it is realized and confirmed for us on Sukkot. And it is that spirit of understanding our role in this world of eternal values that truly occasions within us the joy and happiness that radiates from the holiday of Sukkot. 🍷