



Parashah Insights
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Parashat Haazinu
A Message of Repentance

Heaven and Earth

The *parashah* of *Haazinu* carries an important message, especially appropriate for the Ten Days of Repentance, and for *Shabbat Shuvah* in particular. It begins with the words, “Listen, Heavens, and I will speak (*adaberah*), and the earth will hear the words of my mouth (*imre fi*)” (*Devarim* 32:1).

“Heavens” is a reference to Torah scholars, who engage in spiritual and Heavenly matters – Torah and *mitzvot* – which have the power to rectify and perfect the Higher Worlds. The Torah addresses them specifically with the term *adaberah*, derived from *dibbur*, which implies harsh words. This is because the demands on the learned and righteous are especially high. They are comparable to a king’s personal attendants, who are constantly in the presence of majesty and must conduct themselves accordingly. As our Sages tell us (*Yevamot* 121b), “And His surroundings are exceedingly turbulent (*nisara*)” (*Tehillim* 50:3). We find that the Holy One, blessed be He, is exacting with His righteous ones to a hair’s breadth (*hut hasaarah*). Rabbi Hanina learns this from another verse: ‘G-d is feared in the counsel of the holy ones, and is awesome over all those around Him’ (*Tehillim* 89:8).” In contrast, simple people, called “the earth,” are addressed with *imre fi*, derived from the softer term *amirah*. The Torah speaks to them gently, with words of encouragement and support.

“Let my teaching (*lekah*) gush like the rain, let my talk trickle like dew” (32:2).

“Teaching” (*lekah*) refers to Torah, which is called *lekah tov*, “a good teaching” (*Taanit* 7a, citing *Mishle* 4:2). Torah scholars throw all their energy and strength into



studying, debating, and clarifying Hashem's sacred Torah. For them, Torah will **"gush like the rain,"** surging forth in a powerful flow. For simple people, Torah will **"trickle like dew."** Their study is on a more elementary level, consisting largely of ethical teachings and appealing Scriptural interpretations; it is not the mighty downpour characteristic of scholars. It is instead *amirah*, soft, gentle words that envelop the heart in warmth, like a soft blanket of dew.

Torah and Middot

The Vilna Gaon teaches that Torah has the capacity to foster growth, like **rain** and **dew** (*Even Shelemah*, Chapter 1, *Ot Yud-alef*). However, the harvest nurtured by the rain depends on the seeds which were planted beforehand; those are the only seeds the rain can cause to sprout. If we prepare ourselves by purifying and refining our *middot* as a preliminary to Torah study, then the Torah we learn will produce a magnificent edifice. If we do not bother to improve our *middot*, feeling that we should certainly be able to learn as we are, Torah will help us grow nevertheless – into wild, brutish beasts, G-d forbid. Torah study only ripens what already exists in man. If he is refined, it will enhance and develop that refinement. If he is coarse and corrupt, it will expand these unfortunate traits still further.

However, we find that the Gaon discusses a similar concept elsewhere (*Divre Eliyahu, Parashat Vayeshev*). Our Sages cite the verse which describes the pit where Yosef was thrown by his brothers: "And the pit was empty, there was no water in it" (*Bereshit 37:24*). They point out that if the pit was empty, it obviously contained no water. They derive from this apparently redundant wording that while the pit was empty of water, it did hold something else: snakes and scorpions (*Shabbat 22a*).

Torah is often compared to water (as in *Baba Kama 17a, Devarim Rabbah 17:3*). The Gaon explains that one who is empty of the waters of Torah will instead be full of "snakes and scorpions." He may seem to be a decent enough fellow with pleasant character traits, but deep inside, his heart is a seething mass of ugly *middot*, carefully concealed from view. Inevitably, the truth will one day emerge. The minute he is faced with any sort of trial, the corruption in his heart will come bubbling to the surface to be revealed at its worst. Why? Because he lacks Torah, the only preventive and the only cure for bad *middot*.

We see that on the one hand, the Gaon writes that Torah will foster the growth of man's existing character traits. Torah surely does not implant bad *middot*, but if they are already there from birth, Torah will make them grow even worse. On the other hand, he writes that the only possible way to improve poor *middot* is by learning Torah. Is this not a contradiction?¹

¹I explain this apparent contradiction at length in the essay on *Maalot HaMiddot* in my work *Yismah Moshe*.



We can resolve this contradiction by studying the Hazon Ish's words in *Emunah U'Bitahon* (Chapter 3). He writes that the study of *mussar* on its own will not suffice to correct flawed *middot*. If anything, the results can be just the opposite. Our personal interests are sure to blind us to our own flaws. Nonetheless, having learned all about the terrible effects of bad *middot*, we will be piously inspired to seek out faults and shortcomings, if not in ourselves, then in those around us.

Without the guidelines of *halachah* to direct our instincts and emotions, we will be unable to differentiate between right and wrong. He cites as an example the halachic concept of a *rodef* (pursuer) and a *nirdaf* (the pursued). Emotionally, we will sympathize with the pursued, and despise the pursuer. However, lacking in-depth knowledge of *halachah*, our personal interests will so confuse us that we will be unable to accurately identify the two sides! Perhaps the individual we perceive to be the injured party is actually at fault, while the other party is not the perpetrator of injustice but rather, its victim.

Torah study and careful observance of *halachah* are prerequisites for the correction and refinement of *middot*. If our consistent aim is to seek truth and subordinate ourselves to its dictates, it follows that this attitude will carry over to the area of *middot* as well. We will be capable of seeing our own faults and correcting them.

As we see, then, Torah and *middot* go hand in hand. We must scrutinize our deeds carefully and work to refine our character, for if not, the Torah we learn will only serve to fuel our bad *middot*. At the same time, in-depth Torah study and meticulous observance of *halachah* open our eyes to the reality of our own faults, enabling us to improve ourselves.

The Trial

“The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice, a G-d of faith without injustice” (32:4).

Everything Hashem created is perfect, specifically because **“all His ways are justice.”** Let us try to understand the connection between the two parts of the verse.

The Ramhal explains the Kabbalistic teaching that man and the world were created because Hashem is the Source of all good, and it is His Will to bestow goodness on man (*Derech Hashem*, Part 1, Chapter 2).

In order for the good Hashem gives us to be perfect and complete, He has equipped us with the means to earn it – our Free Will, or the freedom to choose between good and evil. If we overcome the wiles of our evil inclination and make the right choices, the reward we receive is proudly and rightfully earned, rather than the rather embarrassing handout our Sages call *nahama d'kisufa*, literally “bread of



shame.” Since it is Hashem’s Will to give us maximum good, He tests us, and then judges us on the way we withstood those tests.

Man was created for a distinct purpose: his ultimate trial by the Heavenly Court, where his deeds will be weighed to assess whether he has fulfilled his task of rectifying both himself and the world. Hashem does not need this trial for the sake of His honor; *we* need it, for the sake of our eternal reward. The trial itself is conducted with absolute justice and fairness, because He is “**a G-d of faith without injustice.**”

The King’s Portrait

“They cause a defect in Him. The blemish is not [only] in His children, a perverse and corrupt generation” (32:5).

We can understand this verse on a very profound level.

Man was created in the image of G-d (*Bereshit* 1:27). As a result, all our actions have repercussions in the Higher Worlds, which are themselves the higher image of G-d, spiritual manifestations of His greatness. By sinning, G-d forbid, we can literally destroy those worlds. Our Sages compare this to “sinning against the king’s portrait” (*Shmot Rabbah* 30:21; see *Nefesh HaHayyim, Shaar Alef*, Chapter 6). Our transgressions are like rocks willfully hurled at Hashem’s image. The *Zohar* writes that “because of this, one who transgresses the Torah’s commandments is as if he has sinned against the person of the king... Woe to sinners who sin and do not realize what they are doing” (*Yitro*, p. 85b).

A sinner destroys the Higher Worlds, which are a revelation of G-d. When we sin, not only do we cause ourselves spiritual harm. We are literally striking out at the Almighty, by blemishing the spiritual image of G-d in the Higher Worlds. (Figuratively speaking, this means that the manner in which He relates to us will be “deformed.”)

Our perception of the concept of sin is very simplistic. As we see it, a sin equals punishment and a *mitzvah* equals reward. We like to think that it is up to us to decide whether the immediate pleasure of sin is worth its eventual punishment, and whether reward in the future justifies the effort required by the *mitzvah*. We do not realize that our deeds have a much greater impact than our own personal tradeoff. If we understood the profound significance of our actions on the higher spiritual worlds, we would conduct ourselves accordingly, and our lives would probably look quite different. Instead, we choose to ignore this fact. We confine ourselves to life’s physical aspects, because we are “**a perverse and corrupt generation.**” We prefer the convenience of superficiality to the demands of truth, believing that everything begins and ends with ourselves and this physical world.



Blemishing the Name

“Is it to Hashem that you do this, vile and unwise people? Is He not your Father, your Master? Has He not created you and established you?” (32:6).

With these words, Moshe rebuked the nation for paying no heed to the impact of their sins on the higher Worlds. This concept is discussed in the writings of the *Mekubalim*.

The Arizal explains that when we sin, we tear apart the letters of Hashem’s Name, a principle alluded to in the verse, “A sinner separates the Ruler” (*Mishle* 16:28; see Rashi).² Our Sages (*Tanhuma Ki Tetze* 11) cite the verse, “And he said, the Hand is on the Throne of G-d. Hashem has a war with Amalek from generation to generation” (*Shmot* 17:16). The words *kes Y-ah*, “the Throne of G-d,” are written in a shortened form rather than with the usual full spelling. *Kes* does not have an *alef* at the end (*kisse*) and the Name of Hashem is written with only with the first two letters, *yud* and *keh*, rather than as *yud-keh-vav-keh*. The evil of Amalek blemished Hashem’s Throne and his Name, so to speak, separating the *yud-keh* from the *vav-keh*.³

Man’s sins only have the power to blemish the *vav-keh*, the last two letters of Hashem’s Name, but not the *yud-keh*, the first two letters. *Yud-keh* is the source of Divine bounty. Separating the *yud-keh* from the *vav-keh* causes great harm by preventing the influx of Divine blessing from all four letters of the Name, resulting in many negative repercussions in this world.

Moshe told the nation, **“Is it to Hashem that you do this, vile and unwise people?”** Their sins ascend to the Heavens, blemishing the revelation of Hashem in the Higher Worlds, and tearing apart the letters of Hashem’s Own Name.

The Heh of Repentance

Heh, the first letter of the Hebrew word ***halaHashem*** (**Is it to Hashem**) refers to repentance. It is related to the letter *heh* in the word *teshuvah* (repentance), which can also be read as *tashuv-heh*, literally “return *heh*.”

In addition, the letter *heh* represents the Heavenly storehouse of souls, from which the souls of the Jewish nation are derived. Through the root of our soul, we are connected to the letter *heh*, and every sin we commit damages it. When we repent, our *teshuvah*, which, as we explained, is also connected to the letter *heh*, repairs the blemished *heh*, restoring it to perfection.

Our Sages explain how *teshuvah* is related to the letter *heh*. Hashem created the Higher Worlds with the letter *yud*, and this world with the letter *heh*. The Sages

² This speaks figuratively and should not be taken literally.

³ See *Parashah Insights on Nitzavim* for a fuller discussion of this concept.



teach that the shape of the letter *heh* is very significant. It is like an alleyway, closed in on three sides, with a wide opening at the bottom, and just a small window open up on the side.

The wide opening at the bottom teaches us that our world is wide open to opportunities for sin, with plenty of room for transgressors to go plummeting down to *Gehinom*. If a sinner wishes to repent and pull himself back up, he will not be able to go through the larger opening at the bottom, which would expose him once more to all the temptations of sin. His only hope is to make the harder climb up to the tiny opening up at the side (*Menahot 29b*).

The *heh's* distinctive shape also teaches us the concept of Free Will. All the world's sins come rushing in through the opening at the bottom; if we crave evil, we will have no trouble finding it. Not surprisingly, this same opening, conveniently located down below, leads straight to perdition.

A sinner seeking to repent cannot return by the main road; the free-for-all at the gate would be too much for him, so to speak. Having once crossed the barriers against sin, he needs exceptionally powerful protection in the future. His only hope is to stay far away from the path of temptation. The righteous individual who has never sinned will not easily succumb when exposed to life and its temptations. A penitent is much more vulnerable, because the familiarity of sin will exert a very strong attraction. He must raise himself to the small upper opening – the window of the *heh* – by afflicting himself and shunning the worldly pleasures represented by the *heh's* main opening.

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero explains that Hashem deals with us differently than we deal with one another. Let us say that two friends quarrel. Even after they patch things up, the relationship will never be quite the same as it was before. But when we sin and then repent, our connection to Hashem becomes even stronger than before, and we are even more beloved. In the words of our Sages, "In the place where penitents stand, the perfectly righteous cannot stand" (*Berachot 34b*). He explains that this is why our Sages say that the letter *heh* is shaped like an alley. The road down to sin gapes wide open, and it is easy enough to jump in and sink to the bottom. There is also a smaller opening at the top, because if we attempt to return to Hashem, He will welcome us back (*Tomer Devorah*, Chapter 1).

Teshuvah, repentance, pulls the *heh* back up after it has been dragged down and blemished by sin. Our repentance restores the missing letter to Hashem's Name, so to speak, rectifying our soul and earning us Hashem's unending love. This is why the *heh* was linked to Hashem's Name.



Our Heavenly Father

During the holy Days of Repentance, when we address Hashem as *Avinu Malkenu*, “our Father, our King,” He is more than ever our personal, loving Father.

In what sense is Hashem our Father?

Adam, the ancestor of all mankind, was G-d’s Own handiwork. In addition, our Sages teach that Hashem Himself is involved in the formation of every human being: “There are three partners in the creation of a person, the Holy One, blessed be He, his father, and his mother. His father implants the white matter, from which develop the bones, sinews, nails, the brain, and the white of the eye. His mother implants red matter, from which develop the skin, the flesh, the hair, and the pupil of the eye. And the Holy One, blessed be He, instills the life force, and his soul, the light of his face, eyesight, hearing, speech, gait, and intelligence and wisdom” (*Niddah* 31a).

A powerful bond connects father and son. A son’s deeds are a testimony to his parents: “A child’s talk in the marketplace is either from his father or from his mother” (*Sukkah* 56b). How can it be that the bearer of a G-dly soul, blown into him by the Al-mighty, is capable of perpetrating evil? Our evil deeds blemish Hashem’s honor, as it were.

When man, the image of G-d, sins, he sullies the root of his soul. **“Is He not your Father, your Master? Has He not created you and established you?”** Hashem is our Father, Who created us. His imprint is unmistakably stamped upon us, making our corrupt behavior a terrible disgrace to Heaven.

Inherent in man’s creation is the impact of his every deed on the Higher Worlds, whether good or bad; this is the way Hashem **“created us and established us.”** It follows that we must be wise enough to take extreme care in all our actions.

Israel and the Nations

“Remember the days of yore, reflect on the years of generation to generation. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will say to you. When the Al-mighty gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided the descendents of man, He set the borders of the nations according to the number of the Children of Israel” (32:7-8).

By recalling the events of earlier generations, we can learn a great deal about what to expect for ourselves in our own times.

What happened in the early days of Creation?

Adam, the first man, was created with an enormously great soul, which encompassed the souls of all mankind. When he sinned, these souls were dispersed and fell into the clutches of the Forces of Impurity. They were reborn time after time, in the Generation of the Flood, in the Generation of the Dispersal, and more, until



eventually they were reborn yet again in the Children of Israel who descended to Egypt. Through the suffering of their enslavement, the Jews rectified and elevated these fallen souls. The Arizal explains that the process of the descent of the souls to Egypt began in the time of our Forefather Avraham (*Shaar HaPesukim, Parashat Shmot*). We find reference to this concept in our Sages' teaching that the four hundred years of the Egyptian exile began with the birth of Yitzhak (*Bereshit 15:13, Rashi; Shmot 12:40, Rashi*).

The Torah tells us, **“Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will say to you.”** By asking our ancestors, we will know how events unfolded. From the time that Hashem chose Avraham to be the founder of the Jewish nation, all those holy souls would be reborn only as Jews. Concerning that time in history the Torah says, **“when the Al-mighty gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided the descendents of man.”** Mankind was split into distinct nations, each with its own source of Heavenly influx. All of these nations were relegated to the care of specific angels known as the “ministers” of each nation. While Hashem is certainly aware of every detail of their lives, He is not intimately involved with them, as He is with the Jewish people.

Hashem chose Avraham alone of all mankind as the progenitor of His chosen people, who would be connected to Him directly with special, individual Divine Providence (*hashgachah pratit*). Their affairs would be managed at all times by the Al-mighty Himself, and not by the stars, constellations, or angelic appointees, as we learn from the verse, “Only you I know from all the families of the earth” (*Amos 3:2*).

The Ramhal discusses the complex topic of Yisrael as Hashem's chosen nation (*Derech Hashem 2:4*). Hashem created the world for the sake of Yisrael, who would fulfill the purpose of Creation (see *Bereshit 1:1, Rashi*). Who was this “Yisrael?” Early in the history of the world, it was still unknown; it could have been anyone whose merits were great enough to earn this lofty role for his descendents. In the period following Adam's sin up until the Generation of the Dispersal, the exact identity of this “chosen people” remained an open question.

Until Avraham was born, there was no individual worthy of being the ancestor of the future Yisrael. In the era of the Generation of the Dispersal, Hashem chose Avraham as the progenitor of His chosen people, while the rest of mankind was divided into seventy nations. In the words of the Ramhal, “Avraham alone was selected due to his deeds and was elevated, and was established to be the superior, precious tree in keeping with the highest level of mankind, and it was granted to him to produce branches like himself.” It was Avraham who was chosen because of his unparalleled spiritual stature. He would be the one to maintain Adam's high level, and all the souls of the Jewish people would stem from him. The other nations would remain on their existing lower levels.



There was a major difference in history before and after Avraham. The generations who lived before Avraham were the roots of the seventy nations. From Avraham onwards, all nations are branches of the original seventy. There will never be more than these seventy nations and Yisrael; all others that have since arisen are their offshoots.

As we see, Hashem “**set the borders of the nations according to the number of the Children of Israel,**” singling out the Jewish people and setting them apart specifically as His, the one nation granted His Own personal supervision.

The Rope

“For Hashem’s portion is His people, Yaakov is the lot of His inheritance” (32:9).

Yisrael – the Jewish nation – was selected as Hashem’s Own. The root of the soul of Yisrael is *Helek Eloka Mimaal* – a G-dly entity which descends from the Higher Worlds. The Torah uses the words *hevel nahalato*, literally “**the rope of His inheritance**” (see Rashi). The *Nefesh HaHayyim* explains that if we shake the bottom end of a rope, there will be movement all along it up to the top, even if the rope is very long. Motion at the bottom generates motion at the top. Our soul, down here in our body, is attached to its higher root in Heaven. Our actions on earth “shake the rope” which connects our soul to the Higher Worlds (*Shaar Alef* Chapter 5). We find a similar concept in the Torah’s description of Yaakov’s prophetic dream: “A ladder standing on the ground and its head reaching to the Heavens, and behold, angels of G-d are ascending and descending on it” (*Bereshit* 28:12). The feet of the ladder were down here on earth, but its head rose up to Hashem in Heaven.

Loving Care

“He found them in a desert land, and in desolation, a parched wilderness. He encircled him, He granted him wisdom, He preserved him like the pupil of his eye... Hashem alone guided them, and no other god was with Him” (32:10,12).

This verse and those which follow describe the loving protection and personal supervision which Hashem bestows upon His people. The words “**Hashem alone guided them, and no other god was with Him**” highlight the special nature of Hashem’s bond with us: we are His nation, under His direct, individual care with no intermediaries, unlike the other nations, who are under the influence of the zodiac.

As a result, our sustenance also comes from His bountiful Hand: “**He made him ride on the heights of the land, and he ate the produce of My fields. He nursed him with honey from a stone and oil from a rock, the butter of cattle and the milk of sheep, with the fat of lambs, and rams from Bashan and goats, with wheat like kidneys, and you drank the blood of grapes like wine**” (32:13-14).



The words **“heights of the land”** emphasize that the Jewish people receive their influx from the Heavens above, rather than from the earth below. The **honey** and the **oil** which nourish them are an allusion to the Torah they learn. The entire range of spiritual and material bounty described in these verses is from the Hand of Hashem.

Unfortunately, our nation did not recognize this: **“And Yeshurun grew fat and kicked, you grew fat, you grew thick, you grew heavy. It forsook G-d Who made it, and profaned the Rock of its salvation”** (32:15). As we explained, when we sin here – when we kick out at the Al-mighty – we cause a blemish in the Higher Worlds, **“profaning the Rock of our salvation.”** Once we are on our way, one sin leads to another, culminating in the worst of abominations: **“They made Him jealous with strange gods, and angered Him with idolatry. They sacrificed to demons, not G-d, gods they did not know, newcomers recently arrived whom their fathers never imagined”** (32:16-17).

We must remember that we are Hashem’s children: **“The Rock Who bore you, you ignored (*teshi*), and forgot the G-d Who brought you forth.”** The word *teshi* literally means “weak.” As we explained, a son’s sins harm his father. The blemish caused by our transgressions here, when we forget G-d, causes “weakness” in the Higher Worlds, so to speak.

Remembering the Shechinah

The verses which follow are a frightening litany of the disaster and retribution which will overtake the nation, punishing them for disobeying G-d and forsaking Him. This topic concludes with the words, **“For they are a nation without counsel, and they have no understanding. If they were wise, they would reflect on this (*zot*), and understand what their end will be”** (32:28-29).

If our nation had only **“reflected on *zot*,”** they would comprehend the concept of the *Shechinah*, which is called “*Zot*” (*Tikune Zohar Hadash* p. 114a). We find this term in the verse “With this (*b’zot*) Aharon will come to the Sanctuary” (*Vayikra* 16:3), meaning that Aharon entered the Sanctuary together with the *Shechinah*. The Divine Presence is with us in exile: “I am with him in distress” (*Tehillim* 91:15). Our Sages tell us, “At the time when a person suffers, what words does the Divine Presence say? Woe to Me from My Head, woe to Me from My Arm” (*Hagigah* 15b). The suffering of His people causes suffering and pain in the corresponding “limb,” so to speak, of the Divine Presence.

If we had been wise enough to take the *Shechinah* into consideration, we would **“understand what their end will be.”** Ultimately, man’s soul returns to its roots, cleaving to the *Shechinah*, the root of all souls. Any serious reflection on this truth should be enough to inspire us with intense fear of Heaven. (This concept is discussed and developed throughout the *Nefesh HaHayyim*).



The Source of Evil

“Serpents’ venom is their wine, and the head of cruel vipers. Is it not concealed with Me, sealed in My treasuries?” (32:33-34).

The terms “serpents’ venom... and the head of cruel vipers” refer to the evil inclination and the Satan, the source of all the Forces of Impurity. These verses teach us that even the evil inclination has an element of holiness and can eventually achieve rectification, since its root derives from the Higher Worlds. Our task is to transform the evil inclination “from a demon to an angel” (*Etz Hayyim, Shaar Nun, Chapter 3*).

Hashem says that the serpent, which is symbolic of the Satan, is “**concealed with Me, sealed in My treasuries.**” Everything that exists has a source in the sanctity of the Higher Worlds, and evil is no exception. Its source is Hashem’s Attribute of Might (*Gevurah*), which is a constricting and concealing force. When Hashem conceals His full might and rules with this apparently limited force, it leaves room for the forces of evil to operate.

In this sense, the “**serpent’s venom**” and the “**viper’s head**” are “**concealed with Me,**” meaning hidden with Hashem. Hashem has no evil; He is absolute good. However, even the forces of evil have an element of good because their source is from Hashem. They were created for the purpose of trying His created beings, so that they can earn reward and/or punishment. This is why our Sages teach that we serve Hashem with both our good and our evil inclination (*Berachot 54a*). We find reference to the profound concept of the rectification of the **viper’s head** in the death and burial of Esav, representative of the Satan. Our Sages (*Pirke D’Rabbi Eliezer 39*) tell us that while Esav’s body was buried in Seir, his head was buried with the Forefathers in the Cave of Machpelah, symbolic of its rectification.

Reflection

“See now that I, I am Hashem, and there is no god with Me. I will put to death and I will bring to life. I strike down and I will heal, there is no one who will escape from My Hand” (32:39).

Above all, we must “**See now that I, I am He, and there is no god with Me.**” The Al-mighty is One and there is none other than He. He directs everything in the universe, leading up to the ultimate rectification and salvation. Even evil and spiritual darkness derive from His Will as well. In the words of our Sages, ‘Everything is foreseen, and [even so], freedom of action is given’ (*Avot 3:15*). Even though permission is given – even though man has Free Will – nevertheless, everything is foreseen.



Therefore, the verse continues, **“I will put to death and I will bring to life.”** Life and death are two opposite ends of the spectrum, and yet they are both in the Hands of the Creator. He brings a fitting death upon the wicked, who are considered as dead even while they are still alive, and grants fitting life to the righteous, who are considered as living even after their death (*Berachot* 18b).

“I strike down and I will heal.” One who endures punishment will merit healing, because through his suffering, he achieves rectification. However, **“there is no one who will escape from My Hand.”** There is no person on earth who will not have to give a precise accounting of his deeds. As our Sages tell us, “Everything is given on collateral, and a net is cast over all who live” (*Avot* 3:16). Be it sooner or later, no one will escape the ultimate Heavenly reckoning.

There is only one way to correct our deeds and achieve rectification: Torah study. **“If they were wise, they would reflect on this.”** Through Torah study we recognize the truth, and come to know “He Who spoke and the world came into being” (*Eruvin* 13b). Every day in the Blessing of Repentance, we say, “Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah,” because repentance begins with Torah. During these special days when Hashem lovingly awaits our return, let us be wise enough to improve ourselves and draw closer to Him through His Torah.

This essay contains divre Torah. Please treat it with proper respect.