

Parshat Ha'azinu

# Ha'azinu, Gold, and the Highest Level of Teshuvah

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## The Golden Parshah

The entire book of Deuteronomy constitutes Moses' parting words from the Jewish people. He spoke these words<sup>1</sup> during the final 37 days of his life. 37 is the *gematria* of Abel, Moses' initial incarnation. Most of Moses' words in the book are meant to rebuke the people and warn them of the consequences of leaving the path of God and the Torah. As *Rashi* notes at the outset of Deuteronomy, it is proper for a person to address his family or his disciples in this way when nearing the end of his life.

Following the harsh predictions of 98 punishments that will ensue if the Jewish people transgress, the climax of the rebuke is the song of *Ha'azinu*, which also alludes to every single individual Jew. The *gematria* of *Ha'azinu* (הַאֲזִינוּ) is 79, which is the atomic number of gold. Let us explore this interesting connection.

## Real Rebuke is Motivated by Love

For all its apparent negative context and content, the Magid of Mezritch, the successor of the Ba'al Shem Tov, is known to have been especially fond of the song of *Ha'azinu* and wished that every Jew be fluent in it. This can only be understood if we assume that the song of *Ha'azinu* also contains an immeasurable quantity of sweetness and delight. This hidden dimension of sweetness in the song of *Ha'azinu* can be better appreciated if we note that the finale of the book of Deuteronomy is the blessings given by Moses to the people. In other words, the rebuke leads to the blessings, and therefore, the rebuke is actually a revelation of infinite love, as King Solomon says that, "An open rebuke is preferable to concealed love."<sup>2</sup> In fact, since the last two letters of the word "rebuke" (תוֹכַחָה) in Hebrew—*chet* (ח) and *hei* (ה)—equal 13, which is the value of "love" (אַהֲבָה), the word "rebuke" can be understood to suggest "with love" (תוֹכַחָה אַהֲבָה). Rebuke that is not exclusively motivated by love cannot be heard and is better left unspoken.

Moses' rebuke was clearly motivated by his love for the Jewish people, for whom he had continuously sacrificed his life, and is dripping with sweetness to those with a sensitive ear. In fact, as explained in the *Tanya*,<sup>3</sup> there are two levels of goodness: that which can be revealed openly and that which comes from an even higher source but which is too great to be contained by any vessel and must therefore remain hidden



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within a harsh (and therefore very hard and unbreakable) vessel. Likewise, the love that can be expressed only within the outwardly harsh context of a rebuke is actually higher than that which can be expressed openly. The *Tanya* explains<sup>4</sup> that these two forms of love are likened in the Bible to silver and gold (or water and fire, respectively). In our present state, love that is likened to gold cannot be attained through our own efforts and must be given as a gift from God above. This is similar to the sages' understanding that the true purpose of gold will only be revealed in the World to Come, the future state of humanity with the construction of the Third Temple.

Love that is likened to gold motivates what is called *teshuvah* out of love—a return to God that is motivated by love (rather than fear or awe). The *Tanya*<sup>5</sup> explains that to truly cleanse ourselves of all past transgressions, our *teshuvah* must be motivated by love.<sup>6</sup> The time of year that is particularly suited for attaining this level of *teshuvah* is the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*, the ten days from *Rosh Hashanah* to and including *Yom Kipur*. Most years, *parshat Ha'azinu* is read on Shabbat *Teshuvah*, the Shabbat that falls during the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*.

In short, the inner motivation for Moses' final rebuke, the Song of *Ha'azinu*, was his fiery love for the Jewish people—a love that is likened to gold. But, since this type of love cannot be contained in our present reality within anything but a harsh and hard vessel, Moses grants us the opportunity to receive this ultimate form of love through the rebuke of the Song of *Ha'azinu*. Once Moses has expressed his fiery love for us, he proceeds to bless us in the final Torah portion, *VeZot Habrachah*.

## Unifying Rebuke and Blessing

We have seen that the blessings that appear immediately after *parshat Ha'azinu* in *parshat VeZot Habrachah* (literally: “This is the blessing...”), the final *parshah* of the book of Deuteronomy are made possible by the rebuke of *Ha'azinu*. Thus, rebuke and blessing, are unified by Moses. Indeed, both were spoken by Moses on the final day of his revealed life in this world. [Moses continues to reappear in a revealed manner in every generation in the soul of the spiritual leader of the generation. The *Tikunei Zohar* calls this, “the extension of Moses in every generation.”]

If we add the *gematria* of “rebuke” (תּוֹכַחָה) to that of “blessing” (בְּרָכָה), we get 666, which is also the triangle of 36 (or, the sum of integers from 1 to 36). 666 is the value of the word יִתְרוֹן, which means “benefit” or “better,” which appears exactly 10 times<sup>7</sup> in the Bible, all of which are in the Book of Ecclesiastes that we read during the festival of *Sukot* and which more than any other book of the Bible symbolizes the inner experience and spiritual space of the month of *Tishrei*. The appearance of this word that best relates to the unification of rebuke and blessing (specifically the blessing of Moses that follows his rebuke) is in the verse, “I have seen that wisdom is superior to folly just as light is superior to darkness.”<sup>8,9</sup>

## The Number 666

As a number, 666 is mentioned three times in the Bible, twice in reference to King Solomon and once more in reference to the Jewish returnees (*olim*) from the Babylonian exile:

- “The weight of the gold that came to Solomon in one year was 666 gold talents.”<sup>10</sup>
- “The weight of the gold that came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold.”<sup>11</sup>
- “The offspring of *Adonikam*: 666.”<sup>12</sup>

The first and second verses are almost identical as many of the verses of the books of Kings appear with slight variation in the books of Chronicles. Interestingly, the words for 666 are written differently in each of the three verses.<sup>13</sup>

There is a hidden connection between these verses and our topic of gold. Recall that at the beginning of *parshat Re'eh*, Moses said, “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.” In the original Hebrew, this verse has 7 words. Based on the cantillation marks, they divide into 5 words—“Behold, I set before you today”—and 2 words “a blessing and a curse.” The division of 7 into 5 and 2 is the numerical sign of the word “gold” (זָהָב) in Hebrew since its three letters equal 7, 5, and 2, suggesting the simple equation:  $7 = 5 + 2$ . Gold is the subject of the first two verses in which the number 666 appears and this first verse of *parshat Re'eh* suggests that gold can be either a source of blessing or a source of a curse. This is evident in the context of the Torah where gold is used either for the service of God in His Holy Temple—the source of all blessings—or for the making of the Golden Calf,<sup>14</sup> for the service of a false God—the source of all curses. Since 666 is also the value of “rebuke, blessing” (תּוֹכַחַת בְּרִיָּה), it follows that by expressing his fiery love for the Jewish people in the rebuke of the song of *Ha'azinu*, Moses transformed any curses into blessings.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. The sages describe that in the Book of Deuteronomy Moses' attained the highest level of his prophecy yet. Whereas in the previous four books of the Pentateuch Moses received the words of his prophecy directly from the Almighty and then wrote them down, during all of his speeches documented in Deuteronomy, the Divine Presence spoke directly out of his own throat. The numerical value of “throat” (גְּרוֹן) is 259 or  $7 \cdot 37$ , the number of days during which Moses gave these speeches.

<sup>2</sup>. Proverbs 27:5.

<sup>3</sup>. Chapter 26.

<sup>4</sup>. Chapter 50.

<sup>5</sup>. *Igeret Hateshuvah*.

<sup>6</sup>. On the possibility of *teshuvah* out of love, see *Tanya*, chapter 43.

7. Which naturally correspond to the ten *sefirot*, the correspondence of which is left to the reader.

8. Ecclesiastes 2:13. Note that this word appears twice in this verse. The other instances are found in 1:3, 2:11, 3:9, 5:8, 5:15, 7:12, 10:10, and 10:11.

9. "Light is superior to darkness" alludes to the final verse of the first day of creation, "There was evening and there was morning, *one* day" (Genesis 1:5). Though the day contains both light and darkness, it is named after the light ("God called the light 'day'.") The five verses that describe the first day of creation contain altogether 197 letters. When we compute the value of יתרון in *mispar kidmi*, it is equal to אבגדהוזחטיכלמנסעפצקרשת אבגדהוזחטיכלמנסעפצקר = 2561, or the product of 13 (the value of the word "one" [אֶחָד]) and 197, a truly beautiful example of self-reference.

Furthermore, the value of the words "wisdom is superior to folly just as light is superior to darkness" (יִתְרוֹן לְחִכְמָה מִן הַסְּכָלוֹת בִּיתְרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן הַחֹשֶׁךְ) is 2701, the same as the value of the first verse of the Torah, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ).

<sup>10</sup>. 1 Kings 10:14.

<sup>11</sup>. 2 Chronicles 9:13.

<sup>12</sup>. Ezra 2:13.

<sup>13</sup>. In the original Hebrew they are: שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת וְשָׁשׁ, שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת וְשָׁשׁ, and שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת וְשָׁשׁ.

<sup>14</sup>. The *gematria* of "the Golden Calf" (עֲגֹל הַזָּהָב) is equal to that of "the power of imagination" (כַּח הַמְדוּמָה), which when unrefined through the study of Torah becomes the source of all idolatry, abominable beliefs, and just plain old nonsensical superstitions.

<sup>15</sup>. Interestingly, it was either on the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> of *Tishrei* that God decreed the punishment for the sin of the Golden Calf (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim* 580:2 and *Magen Avraham ad. loc.*). The reading of *parshat Ha'azinu* on these days suggests that every year Moses rebukes us on these days in order to annul the decree and transform the curse into a blessing.