

Parshas: Haazinu

Wake-Up Call

During these Days of Repentance, keep your heart awake.

From the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai; translation and commentary by Shmuel-Simcha Treister, based on Metok MiDevash

"Give ear, O you heavens, and I will speak; hear O earth, the words of my mouth" (Deut. 32:1) [To explain this verse] Rabbi Yehuda opened his discourse with the verse: "I opened [began to repent] to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My soul failed when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him. I called him, but he gave me no answer." (Song of Songs 5:6)

I slept and didn't perform the commands of the Torah when I was walking through the desert... What is written before this verse? "I sleep, but my heart is awake. The voice of my beloved is knocking. Open up to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one". (Ibid. 5:2) The words, "I sleep" are said by the Community of Israel [the sefira of malchut which includes all of the sefirot]. "I slept and didn't perform the commands of the Torah when I was walking through the desert" [because most of the mitzvot apply in the Land of Israel not in the Sinai desert]. However, "...my heart is awake" waiting to enter the Land and fulfill those commands, because all of the mitzvot of the Torah can be fulfilled in the Land of Israel.

"The voice of my beloved is knocking..." refers to Moses, who admonished Israel [enjoining them to keep the Torah] during many arguments [when they complained about their lot] and in many quarrels. This is as written, "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel" (Deut. 1:1)[because he reviewed all the times he had reproved them]. He admonished them for being "...rebellious against the Lord..." (Deut 9:24) and reminded them that at Horeb: "You provoked the Lord to wrath..." (Deut 9:8).

Even though Moses admonished Israel, all his words were said with love and affection... This is what is meant by the words "[The voice of my beloved, i.e. Moses] is knocking" (Songs 5:2)[like pounding on the heart of a patient to revive him].

Even though Moses admonished Israel, all his words were said with love and affection. This is as written, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your G-d; the Lord your G-d has chosen you for Himself, to be a special people out of all of the peoples that are on the face of the earth".

(Deut. 7:6) Also, "You are the children of the Lord your G-d..." (ibid. 14:1) and, "And you who cleaved to the Lord Your G-d are all alive to this very day". (ibid. 4:4)

It is about this [last] verse that it is written, "...and you listened to the voice of the Lord your G-d" (ibid. 27:10) [that is, you listened to the reproofs and rectified your deeds], "Because it was out of love that the Lord your G-d...redeemed you from the hand of Pharaoh". (ibid. 7:8) This [love] is what is referred to in the verse, "Open up to me, my sister, my love" (Songs 5:2) [because Moses spoke to the Children of Israel as one who speaks to his faithful lover].

Israel arose to open their hearts to ...return to their spiritual roots...It [Israel's response] is written, "I arose to open to my beloved..." (ibid. 5:5)

Israel arose to open their hearts to hear the reproof of Moses and return to their spiritual roots. It is interesting that the Zohar brings this verse in relation to teshuvah, as this portion is read on "Shabbat Shuva" and during the time when the Jewish People "arise" for the selichot prayers. The late night/early morning hours are times when the heart is the most receptive and the powerful words of the selichot arouse a ready response. The extra effort involved in rising earlier than usual also adds to one's spiritual merits and demonstrates one's sincere efforts to "open to my Beloved".

Shabbat Shalom!