

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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פרשת האזינו
י"ג בתשרי תשע"ט

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 32:1-52

At the end of Moshe's last speech to *Bnei Yisrael*, Hashem tells Moshe to write down a song to teach to the Israelites. "Put this song in their mouths," Hashem says, "so that the words may become a witness for Me against them. After I bring them to the land that flows with milk and honey, they will eat and be satisfied and become obese. They will turn to other gods and serve them and mock Me and break My covenant. Then when many oppressive evils come upon them, this song will testify against them as witness."

One line of the song says (32:7), "זְכֹר יָמוֹת עוֹלָם, בְּיָנוּ שָׁנוֹת דָּר-דָּר; שְׂאֵל אָבִיךָ ; וְיִגְדְּךָ, וְיִאֱמָרוּ לָךְ. – Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders, and they will tell you."

Within the context of the song, this line refers to those listening to the song asking the previous generation – those who had come out of Egypt and had seen the miracles of the Reed Sea and those in the wilderness firsthand – about the existence of God and the Divine salvation of the Jewish people. However, this verse is a good maxim within any context.

Older people, by sheer force of their having so many years of life experience under their belts, have a great deal to share with us. Yet, we engage them in dialogue far too infrequently. Children, especially, often seem to be intimidated by the elderly. Many seasoned citizens are debilitated, wizened, visually impaired, and exhibit other evidence of the decline of the human body through age, but, like fine wine, many souls improve with time even as the body fails. Seniors are full of advice,

experience, and history. When schools have their students visit nursing homes, the children are often coached to ask the residents what life was like when they were the students' age. The children are often amazed by the stories these folks have to tell about a world without computers or TV, where the family gathered around the radio in the evening; a world where they roamed the streets freely and where there was no security screening at airports; a world of chalkboards, inkwells, and compulsory after-school jobs.

Many of the things we view as history were a real part of senior citizens' lives. They can regale us with tales of the creation of the State of Israel, of the first American in space, of JFK's assassination, of the war in Vietnam. They can share with us a perspective that we, as a different generation, cannot possibly have.

In this season of repentance, a season of connection to God and to the human race, let us remember the wealth of knowledge and wisdom that we can glean from each and every human being. And in the case of the elderly, we would additionally be doing a *mitzvah* by visiting them and easing, even if only for a short time, the loneliness that is endemic to old age.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Do you have relatives who are senior citizens? What was life like when they were kids?
- What age must a person reach before they are considered "old"? Why does this age make them "old"?
- The word זקן – *zaken* means both "old person" and "sage." Why do you think this one word has both of these meanings? How are the meanings related?