

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Ha'azinu  
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פרשת האזינו  
ג' בתשרי תשע"ח

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."

This week comes *Shabbat Shuva*, the Shabbat between *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, which is a good time to remind ourselves of the frailty of human existence and the need to keep God in our lives at all times. The *parasha* also reminds us of God's protection of the Jewish people. The text says (32:11): *כַּנְשֹׁר יַעִיר קֶנֶוּ, עַל-גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחַף; יִפְרֹשׁ כַּנְּפָיו*; "כַּנְשֹׁר יַעִיר קֶנֶוּ, עַל-גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחַף; יִפְרֹשׁ כַּנְּפָיו" – As an eagle that stirs up her nest, hovers over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her limbs..."

The *midrash* asks: What does it mean that the eagle (Hashem) bears her young (the Jewish people) upon her wings? Don't birds usually carry their fledglings in their talons? The *midrash's* answer is simple: the eagle knows that she is the highest flying of all of the birds. Were she to carry her fledglings in her talons, another bird could swoop up and injure them. She therefore carries them upon her wings, where they are absolutely safe from harm as no predator will have access to them. So it was with God and the Jewish people as they left Egypt. God carried them, as it were, upon the Divine shoulders so that they would be safe from harm. God gave them food and water and clothing and vanquished their enemies.

A 1936 poem, "Footprints in the Sand" by Mary Stevenson, is reminiscent of this *midrash*:

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.  
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.  
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,  
other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed  
that during the low periods of my life,  
when I was suffering from  
anguish, sorrow or defeat,  
I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,  
"You promised me Lord,  
that if I followed you,  
you would walk with me always.  
But I have noticed that during  
the most trying periods of my life  
there have only been one  
set of footprints in the sand.  
Why, when I needed you most,  
you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,  
"The times when you have  
seen only one set of footprints in the sand,  
is when I carried you."

As *Shlomo HaMelech* (King Solomon) said in *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes), which we will be reading in two weeks on *Shabbat Chol HaMoed Sukkot* (the intermediate Shabbat of *Sukkot*), there is nothing new under the sun – אין כל חדש תחת השמש.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What is the meaning of the *midrash* and the poem? Why is this an especially good time of year to mention this theme?
- What does “there is nothing new under the sun” mean? Is there literally *nothing* new under the sun?